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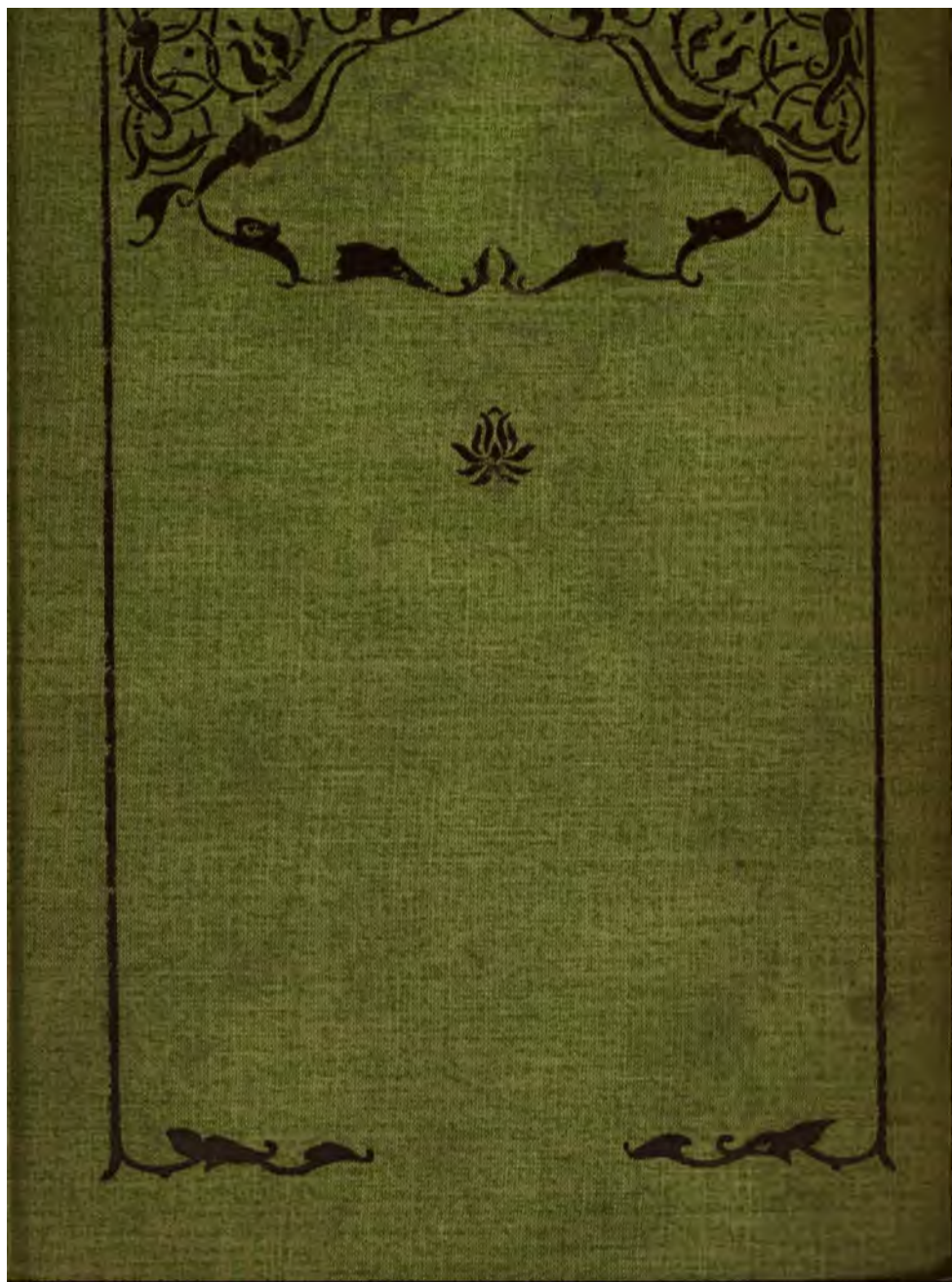
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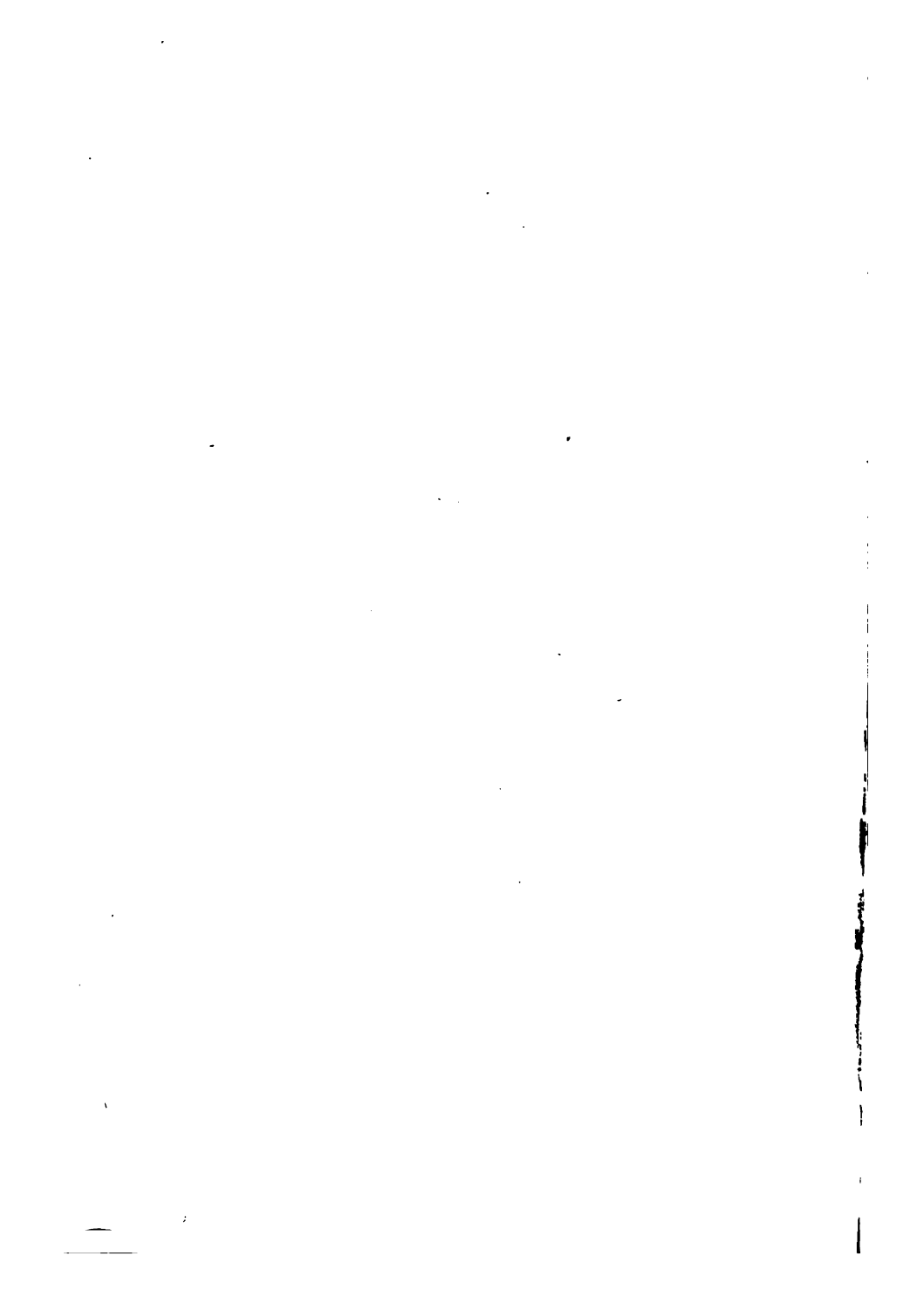
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Friction ()

THE
COUNTRY MINISTER'S LOVE STORY

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THE
COUNTRY MINISTER'S
LOVE STORY

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BY
MARIA BELL
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New York
A. D. F. RANDOLPH & CO.
182 FIFTH AVENUE

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Mrs Edward W. Keble. July 24/19.

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CHAPTER I

LOCHTOWN

A DULL little town. A very dull town indeed.

This little town lay by the shore of a nearly landlocked arm of the sea, a loch—not wild enough to be picturesque or terrible with storm and danger, not smooth enough to be dreamy and romantic. A steamer arrived at the pier ‘twice daily’ in summer, once only in the unfairly long half of the year claimed by winter in the North.

A few voyagers went to and fro. There was a galvanic sort of life for an hour or so at noon, and again at nightfall, the life that consists of the puffing of engines, and the beat of paddles, and the scream of the railway whistle. People came and went in moderate numbers, not in crowds, but no one seemed to wish to stay.

‘How charming! how picturesque! This reminds

one of Venice!' might be the exclamation of a happy bride in the good-nature induced by bridal wear, seeing the row of gas-lamps reflected in the dark water at the pier, and admiring the black spars of a fishing-boat relieved against the amber brightness lingering in the west.

But after a few hours people were apt to tire of the harbour and the faint smell of the sea, the loud voices of the children, the boys wrangling as they dug for bait among the empty preserved-meat tins in the clay pool, and the two coal brigs waiting for cargo.

'Lochtown looks best at night,' said Jane Frederick to the bride; 'even the cattle-trucks take an air of mystery.'

'I call it all quite lovely,' going away in a little glow of enthusiasm. But Jane had to stay there always, so was not so keenly alive to its charm.

Yet she had been content with it for years, all the years of her childhood and her girlhood. She had read a good deal, and thought a good deal, felt too and dreamed, and hoped, and prayed, all in that little town. Now in her womanhood she began to wish to do something new. And amid other surroundings. But the way was barred. 'Sit down and be patient.' 'Wait and your turn will come.'

So she sat down and was patient—waited and her turn had not yet come. She was now twenty-six years old, she had very good health and a good temper, an honest heart, a fair intelligence, and a pleasant face.

She had also a delicate mother whom she dearly loved, and who, having married after her first youth was over, was now growing old.

Jane's father and little brothers lay in the new cemetery on the hill, whilst she and her mother lived on a moderate income, and were happy in a quiet way. It is doubtful if Mrs. Frederick, who was an old-fashioned person with a loving heart, had yet given up regarding Jane as her little lamb, her wee lassie, who was the treasure left to her when husband and boys were taken. Outwardly she was exceedingly sensible, and many people might have thought her strict, but Jane and her mother knew better.

'She would leave Lochtown if I asked her to do it,' thought the good girl, turning the matter of a wider horizon over in her mind during a solitary walk. 'But it would be a terrible wrench to her to leave the cemetery,' looking down as she mused upon the bare, formally laid out acres of grass, and pebbled walks, and white headstones (crosses were not much in vogue at Lochtown), where centred her mother's tenderest thoughts. 'How strange that to a nobly religious person like my mother the grave should be so precious!'

The loch looked very blue reflecting the sky of the autumnal afternoon; there was a light breeze blowing in her face, a breeze from the wider world coming between the headlands from the open sea. The hills seemed

like arms that held her prisoned—kind arms, but not the less detaining, like the arms of a mother.

It was one of those moments of intuition when the truth is flashed with as clear a light on the eyes of dwellers in small places as in large. She could not leave her mother, and her mother could not leave without a heart-break that little ugly town, that bare suburban graveyard, that white cemented stone. 'All my best life is wrapped in her, and here her heart is centred.' A chain of reasoning without a flaw that needed no further argument. 'My heart would be desolate without her, will be desolate when I lose her, as I must too soon—too soon for me, too late for other love.'

"'Tis as well to face facts. I must live in Lochtown while I have my mother. Afterwards I may leave it as soon as I please. Then to make the best of it. What can I do? Write a novel, I suppose, as I have not the opportunity (nor the inclination) to be an hospital nurse, nor to travel in Turkestan and Thibet, nor to study painting in Paris like Marie Bashkirtseff, nor to be the head-mistress of a girls' high school. But what to write about? Ah, here comes a subject! Here comes the hero! "The Little Minister."

'What a pity that I have been forestalled in a title. And this little minister is not so quaint as the Thrums one. Though he is a kind of Covenanter, I imagine.'

She watched him coming towards her between the high, green whin hedges which sheltered the road on either hand, and as she watched she wondered to which division of the dwellers in Lochtown he belonged,—to those who were glad and proud to be there, or to those who longed to get away.

She, a Lochtownner born and bred, was half ashamed to own herself one of the discontented minority.

He too was a Lochtownner born, but not always bred. Ah! no, that was the strange part of it. He had been away, he had been in great cities, he was Master of Arts of a famous University, and yet he had come back to be the 'little minister' of a little community, a dissenting flock in a corner of the land. Was it sublime or only stupid? Perhaps it was neither. It may have been the only thing to do in the circumstances. Yet to choose of one's own free will to settle in Lochtown for a lifetime! Not even to come in a fit of youthful enthusiasm gladly to fill a sphere that opens to receive one's first energies, but to return in cold blood, to return to a place too well known to be taken for magnificent! Jane Frederick, who was fond of turning over in her mind such problems of life and aspects of character as came in her way, had wondered more than once what could have been Henry Millie's motive.

There was really no mystery about it at all, except to the eyes of a girl like Jane, who had a poetic imagina-

tion that was quick to see sorrow and strangeness where other people saw none.

He had been dedicated from his cradle, by pious parents, to the service of Christ, in that small but proudly-pure section of the Church which claimed for itself the longest and least corrupted Covenanting pedigree. He had been eagerly and gladly called by the first congregation that was in need of a minister after his college days were over. He had accepted the call as in duty bound, and had been glad to have a roof to offer his mother in her widowhood.

Now he was doing his best for his people ;—and meanwhile enjoying the quick walk he was taking to the sick-bed of one of his far-scattered flock.

When one is still under thirty (or above it for that matter), one feels exhilarated by air and exercise. He went quickly past Jane, lifting his felt hat in return for her greeting, and hardly to be distinguished in dress and bearing from the curate of the new Church of St. John the Evangelist, down there in the town, although the one was the highest of little High Churchmen, and the other the shepherd of the Covenanting remnant.

‘He has his work to do ; I suppose he is happy,’ thought Jane as she went homeward and Millie sped on his way. ‘But we seem rather to tread on one another’s heels in this little place. It must be difficult to keep up an enthusiastic zeal for the Covenant in the face of so

much competition. Here comes the priest of St. John's, the Rev. Augustine Hunter, and don't I see Father Fisher stepping out of Biddy M'Taldrach's just at his back? And when one remembers Mr. Ferguson, and at least half a dozen others, and the churches are none of them full—— And Mr. Millie is to spend all his life in a forlorn hope to make us once more a Covenanted nation, beginning at Lochtown,—where I shall grow old and die, and have hardly seemed to live at all. Yet Mr. Millie looks thrilling with life. I have a good mind to go and hear him preach next Sunday.'

CHAPTER II

THE COVENANTING KIRK

THIS is not a story of surprises ; it pretends to be a transcript of life. So you will expect to hear that when next Sunday afternoon came the Covenanting Church of Lochtown had a new hearer within its walls.

Jane Frederick had gone with her mother to her own Church in the morning (as is still the dutiful custom of self-respecting people in Scotland), and then, after the early dinner which was almost universal in Lochtown, was free to seek instruction elsewhere.

So she stepped along the empty, ill-paved, narrow streets, duller even than usual with the shutters of the shops all closed, to where at the top of a steep lane stood the Covenanting Kirk.

An odour of peppermint was already perceptible when she went in, some child with commendable forethought trying to drive away sleep ere yet 'the prayer was up.' Jane sat down and looked about her.

The plain square building had a certain modest dignity of its own, and the people sat quietly, with the satisfied look of those who know they are waiting for something worth listening to. The heavy wooden pulpit, carved by a local artist, was clumsy perhaps, but not unimpressive with its massive curves of foliage. The precentor sat ready in his desk ; and then the minister stepped in.

Jane looked at him with critical eyes, as the possible hero of the novel she meant to write. How should she describe him ?

A manly-looking young fellow, with a touch of pathos in his air as he stood there without any pomp of surplice or even gown ; the hair and brow and eyes that one sees oftenest under a trencher cap, and on the streets of Oxford rather than of Cambridge ; a well-cut nose, a small mouth, the blue shaven cheeks of a priest with deep lines about the jaws, a beardless, rather retreating chin.

But his voice was the most distinctive point about him. A soft yet plangent voice, the voice with which one imagines Hugh M'Kail sang his death-psalm on the scaffold on the High Street. No wonder if the shop-girls in the front pews sat and gazed at him open-mouthed, and had put those pink roses in their hats on his behalf. Jane felt herself curiously stirred by that voice, so strangely pathetic yet so natural, even so Scotch in its intonation.

The service went on, and her wondering interest deepened.

This was a little minister to be sure, but where were the oddities that could be smiled over by half-understanding London readers, who take for burlesque whatever their knowledge of the Thrums dialect leaves obscure?

This was the voice of a cultivated gentleman (or was it a saint?) speaking to a handful of tradespeople and of sleepy children in this dull backwater of the stream of life, telling them high and beautiful truths in the best words he could find, sparing no pains, pouring out the treasures he had found for them in many places.

'On he goes through life,' thought his latest listener, 'full of his books and his dreams, his head in the clouds—but his heart here among this benighted people. I wonder if they understand him in the least.' Grey old farmers, a grocer or two, a retired sea-captain, a few young men, half of them asleep, mothers with little round-headed boys leaning against their comfortable sides, and little lassies sucking sweeties while their bigger sisters cast adoring glances at the minister. And is there any one to reward him by knowing that Christina Rossetti is responsible for those lovely lines, or that Katherine Tynan suggested that other quaint conceit?

Why should he give them all his best while a much

coarser porridge would probably suit them as well. It might become a fascinating occupation to come here and verify the poor young man's quotations,' thought Jane as she went quickly home to her mother. 'But is it not the waste of a delicate tool to place him there? It is as if one had used a slender penknife to carve the leaves of that clumsy pulpit of his, and after all the proper tool would have done it better, and without half the waste of time and heart-break.

'There is something rather interesting about him. How am I to find out more of his disposition and character before I begin putting him into the book?'

She walked along the dull little streets, her heart quite touched by what she had heard. 'Poor young man, is there any use of him toiling after those people? How stupid they looked, how unresponsive, and yet that will be his audience all his life.' It seemed a little tragedy—for him.

'And perhaps for me.' The cold thought came over her as she put her key in the door. After all it was a little place she filled, and if her mother were not there it might be dreadfully bare. Ah! but her gentle voice was heard, and that was welcome enough.

Lochtown was not only a dull little place. It was also inhabited by a dull set of people. It is quite easy to say that all human beings are equally interesting if properly regarded. But it is not true. At least it requires

the eye of an angel or of a genius to find out the interesting qualities.

They were a remarkably commonplace sort of people, the Lochtowners, and strangers whose opinion was unbiassed often noticed the great lack of personal beauty amongst them, especially amongst the females. There was a dead level of mediocrity in their faces as well as in their circumstances. A number of moderately well-to-do people lived in Lochtown, but hardly any gentlefolks. A floating population, too, of beggars—perhaps the least attractive sort of poor.

Besides Mrs. Frederick (who, though a widow of limited means, was, it must not be forgotten, a daughter of one of the great houses of the shire, and could call cousins if she chose with the Lord-Lieutenant himself), there were but one or two old ladies and gentlemen in the town to maintain the traditions of blue blood. To be sociable in Lochtown one must perforce put aside any prejudices of that sort.

But worse still, there was no aristocracy of intellect to make up for the lack of aristocracy of birth; and worst of all, Jane Frederick used to groan to her mother in half-laughing despair over the still more fatal lack of an aristocracy of worth.

‘This is the most pride-feeding place you could have chosen for our abode, mother. I really believe you and I are the best-born and the best-brained and the best-

behaved people in it. How can I help being a Pharisee when I see how superior my mamma is to all around her, and that her dear daughter makes not a bad second ?'

'Hush ! hush ! dear,' said the good mother, 'every day I live I see more clearly how I come short in everything.'

'But that just proves what I say. Nobody else in Lochtown is humble like you. That's part of your superiority to them all. Even I have my ideals, but no Lochtowner sees the need of having one. If there was even an intelligent atheist in the town I could respect him, but we are all orthodox and indifferent. We read nothing, and we wish to read nothing, more abstruse than the *Strand Magazine* and *Ally Sloper*. Other places have Browning Societies. If Lochtown sets up a society, it will be for the study of *Pick-Me-Up* or *Tit-Bits*. The smarter of us read *Modern Society*, and the sentimental the works of Grace Aguilar and *The Wide Wide World*.'

'We ought perhaps to have gone away when I lost your father,' said the gentle mother. 'Your uncle urged it, and he may have been right, but I am too old to move now, dear, I am afraid,' and she sighed with the burdened sense of shortcoming, which was more commonly felt by the generation to which she belonged than it is by the self-confident race of to-day.

'No, no, mother,' said Jane good-humouredly, 'I

don't insist on an immediate flitting. I am only explaining to you why I am not to be blamed if "pride, ugly pride" should prove to be my besetting sin. But did my Uncle Frank actually urge you to leave Lochtown? I did not know he condescended to take such an intelligent interest in you after you married my papa. I thought the Hays had no dealings with the Fredericks.'

'Oh, your Uncle Frank was never so foolish as that,' said the widow with a simple dignity; 'he had seen and known your father. And, dear child, I wish you would not fall into that light way of speaking you used just now. I am sure you mean no harm, but it hurts your old mother to hear the words of Scripture turned even into an innocent joke. And I wish we heard oftener of your uncle. He is all you have to look to when I am gone.'

'Now, mother, you forget how old I am,' said Jane, taking her hand and stroking it. 'A person of twenty-six ought to be able to look to herself with more confidence than to any uncle, even though he is one of the "handsome Hays," and has the best woman in Scotland for his sister. And I'll try to give up that bad habit of paraphrasing Scripture; for, do you know, I believe it is vulgar, and that's almost worse than wicked in the eyes of a Lochtownshire collateral!'

'Oh, mother, you should not have done it! I am sure my father was a gentleman, but there is the taint

of snobbishness about me that comes from the mixture. I am not a thoroughbred like my little mamma. I should find it far harder than you did to marry a country doctor. My heart pines for gentility in a fashion that is humbling to think of.

‘I can’t help being more interested in swells I don’t know than in Lochtowners I do. Even their names are so much more attractive. I am ever so pleased when any one tells me I am like my great-grandmother Lady Jane, or that I favour the old Laird. I don’t care to be told I am “quite a Frederick,” as Aunt MacLure is so fond of assuring me.’

‘But it is quite a mistake, my dear,’ said the mother, in whom family affection was still very strong; ‘there is no doubt of your being a Hay, no doubt whatever. And your father was totally different from the rest of his family in appearance as well as in everything else. No one could have imagined he had a sister like your Aunt MacLure, although she is an excellent woman in her way. But we ought to remember that, as the old motto says, “virtue is the sole nobility” and try to be good rather than long to be great.’

‘So we ought, mother, so we ought, and so I am sure you do.’

Jane Frederick had enough of the questioning spirit of the age not to have left even the myth of her father’s commanding superiority undisturbed in its sacredness.

She could not help wondering how much of his attractiveness had lain in the innocent eyes of his wife, who, brought up in great quietness by her aunts, two unworldly, godly gentlewomen, in the end of her young womanhood had been asked in marriage for the first time by the doctor, verging also on middle-age, who had admired her gentle ways, and been perhaps a little dazzled by her position in the county.

He may have been a wonderful man, but his daughter sometimes shrugged her shoulders in secret, and was apt to put down all she did not admire in her own character to the score of his fatherhood. Heredity has a broad back, and must be ready to bear many burdens nowadays.

'Now for my novel,' she said to herself, as, having seen her mother safely in bed, she sat at the fire and drew towards her the ink-bottle wherewith to make a beginning. 'My Covenanter shall be hero, but who is to be heroine, and what skill have I in constructing a story? And if there are to be adventures I shall be quite at a loss.

"The History of Henry Millie"—it sounds like "Henry Milner," which mother used to read aloud to me in my youth. Oh, what nonsense it is after all, when I know nothing about him! He may be the most commonplace young man under the sun, a mere echoer of the dainty conceits of others. For heroine? Myself I

suppose—the only young woman I know well enough to describe. And I don't feel in the least inclined to become Mrs. Covenanter. Don't I? I certainly do not.

'Well, he has a wonderful voice, so sweet, so piteous, so manly too. I could imagine a person obeying any one who spoke to her in such a voice. Is it possibly true after all that one might become infatuated, and follow a man anywhere for the sake of a voice or something in the turn of his head?

'I don't think so. I really do not think so. Throw aside all one's prejudices, one's sensible thoughts, one's surely right ideas about social distinctions—it would be a little Judgment Day! And then, after one had stripped oneself bare of every rag of habit and custom for his sake, by and by to find that it was a delusion, and that he was nothing but an ordinary mortal—no better than oneself, only without the small advantages one had held and cast away!

'Was my mother ever sorry she had left her shelter among the handsome Hays to become the doctor's wife?

'And there may have been something special about my father, as she believes there was.

'It is an interesting problem. Could I imagine myself in love with this Covenanter? Or would the glamour always be wanting that a little gentle blood gives a man

in my eyes? Am I going to take the plunge at last that every girl in Lochtown takes, or thinks she takes, before she has left her teens? Or have I so cold a heart that I could not love any man? Is it that the most ordinary people have a power of affection that I do not possess? I who think myself so superior in many ways.

‘To be sure, something would have to be allowed for the effect a man’s preference might have on one. How much, I wonder?’

‘The whole problem of love seems to me to resolve itself into a matter of temperament. If one is hot-blooded and ill-educated, one rushes into it blindfold—if one is cautious, and yet imaginative, like the great Jane Frederick, one may keep out of it very easily, or walk into it with rose-coloured spectacles deliberately put on. But as to the part the heart plays—the heart, that all lovers and poets insist so much upon—I can’t be sure about that. And then if the man had a strange, unaccountable voice, and one was fanciful, that would be an unknown quantity that might turn out greater than one foresaw.

‘Perhaps it may be only novelty that makes me find his voice interesting. Don’t I remember when I was young I thought the English voice of the curate at St. John’s Mission quite fascinating? The poor little cockney twang, I imagined, showed such culture, and I

was impressed with the small high-priestly airs. Well, I am old enough to be past that sort of silliness now, yet this new idea may be really not much better. How did he say it?

‘Show me thy ways, O Lord !
Thy paths, O teach Thou me :
And do Thou lead me in Thy truth,
Therein my teacher be.

‘My sins and faults of youth
Do Thou, O Lord, forget.

‘And then the quaint mixture—

‘Into the wood my Master went.

‘He seems very fond of poetry. If his name were different, if his mother had been born a lady like mine, he is the kind of person I might lose my head about. And my heart too—if I have one, and if he showed the slightest desire to have it.

‘If “ifs” and “ands”
Were pots and pans——

‘It is perhaps as well that I am not quite a fool.

‘And there is surely no harm in finding a little amusement where I can. I am not likely to take active steps in pursuit of my new hero. Poor Jane ! I don’t think that was ever your failing.

‘But the novel does not make much progress.’

CHAPTER III

WHY NOT?

Now I come to a part of my story which is very pleasant to tell. For I am fond of Jane Frederick, who, it must be understood, is a thoroughly wholesome heroine, and quite good-looking enough to have had plenty more highly-placed admirers than a little minister, however well dowered with a voice like Hugh M'Kail, a person like Patrick Hamilton, or a heart like Renwick, that last and gentlest martyr of the Scottish Covenant.

She had not a fitting sphere, as her dear mother would say, 'from a worldly point of view,' in which to display all her good qualities, but at any rate she had found one person to bow to her charms.

Her fair and honest face as she sat in the corner pew to which she had been proudly led by Geordie M'Culloch, the High Street baker, had caught the eyes of the young minister, who was a young man as well as a minister, as he lifted them from his Bible, and the arrow of her pleasantness had gone straight to his heart.

She looked so plainly dressed, and yet with such a noble air—and noble airs were not common in Lochtown ; and as the service went on and he saw her understanding, and her rapt, reverent listening, what a thrill they sent into the poor eager speaker!

Some one to appreciate his message ! Some one to kindle at his words ! Why, life would be transfigured with such an one, not to share it—his thoughts had not gone yet so fast—but to know even that she was breathing the same air, tried by the same temptations, in the same spiritual arena as himself.

He fell in love with the thought of her there and then.

And it was a good thing that happened to him, whatever should come of it in the future. Nothing but good could come to any man from falling in love with her.

It is a comfort to me to know that while I am representing Jane as sitting in her little room sufficiently interested in the minister to think of making him the hero of her novel (which is yet to be written, and may take some time in the writing), he is doing a good deal more for her.

He is walking about under the stars in the orthodox lover fashion that has come down to us from many generations, and placing her on a pedestal as the lady of his living heart.

He is planning how to approach her ; he is arranging

scenes in which she shall allow herself to be worshipped, and shall smile upon one who adores her.

For he is full of romance although he is not the descendant of knights and gentlemen, and his lot is to preach every Sunday to a handful of tradesfolk. He is charmed with the thought of his mistress's shadowy pretensions to nobility. Half unconsciously they add a glamour to her image in his eyes. He aspires. He would find no pleasure in stooping. 'Tis she who must stoop to reward him if she will. And he is not all unworthy of her regard.

He knows himself a scholar, even with some pretensions to literary culture. He is proud of the pureness of his inherited creed, nor ignorant that there is something chivalrous in his dedication of himself to its defence.

A wider sphere, with larger stipend and more congenial hearers. He cannot but know that they have been offered, and await him if he chooses to accept. Only allegiance to an almost forgotten past holds him back. Do not let us refuse the young man the consolation of feeling himself somewhat of a hero. For my part I am proud of him that he remains so unworldly, and think that any girl would get a good husband who was fortunate enough to attract him.

He is fastidious though, our Covenanter, and does not care very much for the female society which has

hitherto offered itself. There are such men, perhaps more of them than is generally imagined, to whom a well-dressed, good-looking, sensible, suitable girl of the lower middle class, the class to which by all ties of birth they also belong, is an almost absolutely uninteresting creature.

Take her at her best, a girl newly home from a high school, well educated in the newest educational fashion of the day, able to parse half a page of Addison at sight after the newest laws of analysis, able to translate a difficult German author pretty fluently, and even to run over the names of the historians and novelists of the Victorian age—how very unattractive she may yet remain !

There is a 'stodginess' about the product. It is turned out in such masses. It is not very good, nor yet very bad. It has a resemblance to 'halesome parritch' when seen in quantities.

There is not even sufficient beauty to attract the sort of young man I am trying to describe, and a fatal lack of distinction, of charm, moral or intellectual.

A girl in the harvest field might take our young minister's heart by storm, by some real or fancied poetry or grace of motion :

There she stood among the stooks
Praising God with sweetest looks.

The charm, one hopes, would soon be broken ; still

one can imagine its existence for a time. A nun would have a good chance of winning his favourable regard, or a sad widow, or any one with a pitiful past ; but the suitable matches, the daughters of respectable fathers and worthy unimaginative mothers, are the very ones that present the fewest attractions.

Yet that is just what many people find it difficult to believe. They have no conception of

The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow,

that some of us, even the best-behaved, cherish in our hearts. Henry Millie had a mother who lived with him part of the year, and who was partially dependent upon him. She was a gentle, uninteresting little person, in every way inferior to his father, who had been a man of considerable distinction and force of character. Her existence had so far served as a barrier to her son's marriage—a barrier and also a protection against the wiles of the young women of Lochtown. It would have been difficult up till now for her son to make provision for her without sharply pinching himself, should he wish to marry. Things went very well as they were, and Mrs. Millie oscillated contentedly between her various children in a way that a stronger woman might have resisted.

And between his work, his books, and his dreams, helped out by a natural passivity of character which, if he did not take care, might settle into laziness, the minister had hitherto been happy enough.

The near approach of his thirtieth birthday had warned him that youth was flying. He was not without common sense, although he could quote poetry when he chose; and looking round him, he saw that people's characters are apt to be finally moulded about the time the first grey hairs appear. 'If I am to marry at all,' he thought, 'it must be soon.' One of his sisters had been lately left a widow, and was eager that her mother should come and make her permanent home with her. The way seemed to open for Henry's change of state. Then he saw Miss Frederick, a young lady in whom he had always been interested, and then—why then she was in his church that afternoon, and somehow the dart of love seemed to fly straight to his waiting heart, and then he asked himself 'Why not?'

The steps are rapid when one has made up one's mind beforehand. One tires of loneliness and a single life: all the town would be interesting, all the dull months gay, with some one to share them. He hurried on to think of a winter with her, that bright, appreciative companion who spoke (had he not heard her speak?) with a different accent from the rest of the townspeople, that in itself was a charm the more. 'To laugh over

things with me, to understand when I do well, to make the house beautiful, to sit here in the evenings after the doors are locked !'

There was a wonderful fascination in the idea as the young man turned it over in his mind. Why had he never thought of it before? He had written verses in his student days to imaginary mistresses—'dream wives' he had called them—and the lines were often meritorious. Even yet he could not but own them such. But never until to-night had the idea flashed through his slow-working brain to attach his fancies to a living maid. He had been a recluse, a dreamer too long. Now he had found her who could crown his life if she would. But he was sadly ignorant of how to set about winning her.

He could boldly dream of the bliss of having her sitting opposite him in this beloved little study of his, but how was he to do his wooing? 'If I could only ask her "to keep company" with me as the shop-boys do, or I might write to her. Ah no, she would think me mad.

'I'll manage somehow,' he determined. 'Good heavens!' he would have said, only he never used such strong expressions even in soliloquy, 'I can surely ask a person to be my wife, as my neighbours do. It can't be utterly impossible, judging by results.' He smiled as he thought of men whom he knew,

nervous and shy men (and he was neither), who had put the question with intrepidity and success. 'But she is rather different from those wives,' he was proud to remember. 'My wife is a lady! Whose Christian name I do not even know. I have certainly heard it. I wonder what it can be. What a fool I am to have forgotten! It is some little simple name, I think, not the stately name one would expect. I wish it were Dorothea, or Constance, or Elizabeth; Cordelia even or Adelaide she would not have mismatched. I wonder what it really is?' So musing the young man lay long awake. He was an inveterate dreamer, you see, or he might have considered how little, how very little he knew of this lady of his. What a slight foundation there was for his airy castle!

CHAPTER IV

THE ROCKY BAY

LOCHTOWN is not beautiful in itself, but it lies near some places which to lovers of the wild sea-washed Scottish south-land are very dear. Let the Highlanders boast of their lochs and their mountains, of the Ossianic mists that sweep round lonely peaks, of the mystery and magic of the North. To some of us there is no romance anywhere like the charm of the south-country, no solitude like its moorland wastes, no delight deeper than listening to the sweep of the Solway as it flows in strong and steady, to break on lonely shore or strange fantastic headland.

In autumn weather this charm is at its strongest. Jane Frederick (who was not thought romantic) had deep in her heart an almost passionate love for some parts of the country around Lochtown, and it was her greatest pleasure to go alone by the afternoon train which trotted to the coast, and spend a happy hour or two sitting on the shore 'looking frae her.' She loved the high cliff walk with nothing before her but the

broad heaving sea, and far away in the south-west the faint grey line of Ireland, with the sun flashing now and then on green patches of hillside.

But oftenest in our dear south-country the sky and sea are grey with black ships passing to and fro downward to the Isle of Man, or fainter and farther off the long trail of smoke that marks an Atlantic steamer on its way to a longer voyage. To a stay-at-home the very sight of the great vessels opening up far countries in the west is interesting and exciting. One feels in touch with all the wider world.

There are two bays or inlets of which I am thinking as I write. They lie side by side, with a narrow strip of headland between them. One is rocky, the other sandy, and sand is rare on that high cliffy coast. Bracken grows up the sides of the headland, wild thyme too clothes it, and heather and soft moss; while farther inland there is an undergrowth of bushes from which the birches spring. In autumn the brown golden glow of the bracken and the faded purple of the heather make this headland stand out in lovely contrast with the dull green of the sea-beaten woods that stretch silently along the shore, and with the grey of the heaving sea and the grey brooding sadness of the sky. Jane Frederick had passed out to the utmost verge, and was drinking in the stillness of the hour. Her eyes filled with tears as she felt the beauty, the loneliness, the peace.

She wondered why the dim greenness of the woods should make her so happy, for they were not painful tears through which she was gazing.

'I could sit here for ever; I would ask no better heaven than this.'

So still, so sweet, so sad. She was looking over the water and did not see the approach from the shore of some one coming towards her.

He came suddenly round the angle of the path, walking slowly, and starting when he found some one before him. The slight noise of his approach made her look round, to find the grave eyes of the Covenanter upon her. The acquaintance between them was of the slightest, but she smiled in a friendly way at him, and bowed pleasantly in answer to his greeting.

'Shall I disturb you?' he said gently, as she prepared to rise from the heather.

'Not in the least,' she answered, 'but I fear I must go. It is so beautiful that I have been tempted to linger too long.'

He stood, tall and modest, looking out over the quiet waters, while the girl rose and stood by his side. She turned to him with her watch in her hand. 'Can you tell me, please, what o'clock it is? My watch is sadly untrustworthy.' 'Exactly four o'clock.' 'Ah! then I must wait a few minutes,' she said eagerly. 'No, I won't sit down again, thank you,' as he began to

spread his overcoat on the turf. 'I'll stand and watch for her. Ah! there she comes.' And round the western side of the rocky bay, where all was silent emptiness a moment before, came a trail of smoke, heralded by the low panting throb of the screw, and then the black hull of a steamer came swiftly round the point close in shore and right across their sight.

'That is a delight I could not resist waiting for,' she said, smiling at her own foolishness. 'Ever since I was a child, and I saw it come softly stealing round the point one sunny day, its appearance has seemed to me one of the most exciting of events.'

'And I never saw it before,' said the young man with an answering smile. 'I have been here many times but never at the lucky moment,' and he looked with interest after the disappearing vessel.

'Now I must go. Good afternoon.' And as she spoke she turned and went away by the path that winds through the golden bracken round the peaceful sandy bay.

He stood where she left him looking out over the sea, then turned to watch her going up through a harvest field, and standing etched against the sky.

'She is sweet,' he said softly, 'but I could not ask her to stay. She is even more charming than I thought, and yet she has gone so soon.'

He felt himself in a world of romance. The poetic

place they had met in was delightful to his fancy. She harmonised with the soft, tender air, the low-toned colour of the scene. To a young man used to mix in vulgar life there was a great soothing in this place where he had first met his lady since she had been chosen to that post in his heart. 'She is apart from common ways, we meet here in the heart of Nature. She almost made me a confidence: she showed me something dear to her from childhood. It was indeed a fortunate moment. I have made a beginning at least. If I might only have walked back with her. But I had not the impudence nor the boldness to propose it. Oh when shall I have such another chance?'

Meanwhile the lady of his thoughts was walking briskly away from him, a little pleasantly stirred and excited by the meeting.

'He is not disenchanting on nearer view,' she told herself. 'It is long since I have spoken to him, and there is something uncommon about himself as well as his sermons. Is it that soft drawling voice and his innocent eyes that interest me? Oh dear! I shall be late for the train after all. Must I wait for two hours, or shall I trust to the skies and walk home?'

She looked around and overhead, and decided that it would be more prudent to wait. The manse doors were always open, and tea flowed freely in that hospitable house. The walk over the moorlands was attractive,

but the fear of a drenching prevailed : a Galloway wetting is not to be lightly encountered.

So she pushed open the gate of the manse garden, which stands high, overlooking the wide sea on which so many of the old minister's fisher-folk spend, and sometimes lose their lives, and went up the path bordered with bright asters and scarlet geraniums whose summer glory was over, secure of a kind welcome from those within.

CHAPTER V

FIRESIDE TALK

THE gentle old lady who was the minister's wife sat in her arm-chair by the fire in the drawing-room, busy with the knitting which was her constant task. Her sons were out in the world, her only daughter lay in the churchyard at the foot of the hill, and she spent much of her time alone, her kind heart full of tender thought as her hands knitted the socks for her far-off grandchildren.

She was very glad to see Jane, who came in with her light step and bright face to give her news of the outer world.

'May I stay to tea, Mrs. MacDowall?' she asked when the first greetings had been exchanged. 'I meant to have gone home by the four-thirty train, but found I had loitered too long on the cliffs, and so I came to you for refuge.'

'You are very welcome, my love, most welcome. But when will you learn the ways of the world? You

ought to pretend you were coming at any rate. You should say you left Lochtown with no other intention.' And the old lady smiled over her small cynicism.

'So I should, no doubt, if I had been brought up like you in polite circles in London, and taught all sorts of fashionable deception; but I am only a poor and honest Galloway lass, so I don't pretend I came for anything but a sight of my beloved cliffs and sea.'

'Well you will get more than you expected, but I hope you won't mind, dear. My husband asked your neighbour in Lochtown—"the persecuted remnant" I call him, for I have a wretched memory for names—to take a cup of tea with us any day he might be across, and a card came this morning to say he hoped to be here. What is his name, my dear?—a nice-looking lad I thought him, modest and well-behaved, and altogether more like a gentleman than many who have a better right. Ah yes, "Millie" to be sure.

'And now tell me how your dear mother is. I often wish I could see her, and have a talk with her about the old days when she was Mary Hay and I was the stranger English girl Mr. MacDowall brought to pay her first visit in your grand-aunt's house.

'We used to meet so often, and now it is but once in a year, if even then, we are so fortunate. We are both growing so old.

'It is strange, dear, for me to sit here in the long

days, and go over the past. An English girl without an idea that was not English in my head for twenty years—and now an auld Scotch wife, for I have forgotten even my mother tongue, as well as my “father’s house most dear.” Yet I don’t regret it—I don’t regret it. Only, I sometimes ask myself if a Scotch lass could have changed so completely as I did name and nation, almost religion, for his sake.

‘Could you do it, think you, Jane? or do you look down on me because I have done it so completely?’

‘Oh, perhaps not so completely as you think, Mrs. MacDowall; your pretty English speech clings to you still. You are Molly Everingham yet, I can assure you. That makes it such a pleasure and refreshment to spend an hour with you. You are not weighing every word you say lest it should be repeated, as we canny Scotch are said to do. To be sure it must have been a great plunge. But then it was for somebody worth having you made the plunge. Mr. MacDowalls don’t grow on every bush.’

‘Ah you little flatterer! I’ll tell him you said so. But I doubt,’ shaking her head, ‘you are too steady and cautious, and certain that your own ways are best, you true-born Scots, to have done like I did. To be sure I was only a girl, and I may be proud that I had the sense to make such a wise choice. But shall I be Scotch or English in another world, my dear? I seem

not to be sure of my own identity even here. And what will my mother say when she hears I am a Presbyterian? Oh I am a silly old woman to think of such things, but sitting here alone, I ask myself these questions, and it is not so easy to be satisfied with the answers.'

'You chose very wisely, and it was a change for the better you made, I am bound to think,' said Jane, taking the pretty old hand with its diamonds tenderly in hers. 'But then I am not unprejudiced, being as you say a true Scot, and knowing that mine is the better part by birthright.'

'Ah! you are cautious. You don't like to say outright that you despise me,' said Mrs. MacDowall. 'It all depends on the man I believe after all.'

'I daresay it does. But how had a girl of twenty the wisdom to appreciate the right man when he came? Had you seen many men before you chose the right one?'

'Oh, love has eyes,' said the old lady with a pretty flush. 'And to tell you the truth, my dear, there had not been many before him, a cousin or a playfellow, may be, but not any one I could have thought of seriously. And then Archie was different.'

'That's what my mother says,' said Jane unconvinced. '"Your father was different." It appears that you were a very fortunate generation to find so many remarkable husbands. I think some fairy must have dropped

a midsummer spell upon your eyes. Young women nowadays do not seem so happily convinced. I don't think I could say "All for love and the world well lost" with such a complete assurance as my mother did. And I have even a narrower world to lose than she had,' she added with a half-sigh.

'You have your dreams, my dear, and your liberty, and your love, and that's more than everything,' said Mrs. MacDowall brightly. 'But of course you are older than I was, and would naturally be slower (and quite rightly too) to convince that the right man and the right hour had come. It would give me as much pleasure as almost anything now on earth to see you well married, Jane, and I am not forgetful of you in my prayers. I must always love you for the sake of my own Jane, who had you in her arms when you were a baby and she a little laughing child. Never fear,' as Jane began an involuntary remonstrance, 'I ask with all submission. I am not overbold in my askings.'

'You are very good and very kind,' said the visitor softly. 'I should be proud, I think, to have such good friends as you are—you and mother. But, you know,' with a little laugh, 'it is possible to be happy without a husband.'

'No, no, my dear, not happy; you may be good, and patient, and cheerful in a religious way, but you cannot be happy. Never think it, my dear,' and the

tears of eagerness stood in the speaker's eyes, so earnest was she to convince her hearer. 'Don't give away the chance of marriage lightly if it comes to you, for, believe me, in the love of husband and children God means a woman's happiness to lie.'

'But don't you see how cruel that is, if so many have to do without husbands and children? You don't mean to be so unkind as to condemn us all to unhappiness?'

'I can't alter it, my love, I can't alter facts; I wish I could. But I do pray every day that yours may be the happy lot, and in the world to come perhaps it will be made up to the others.'

Jane was silent. She knew of old the soft obstinacy that it was hopeless to try to overcome. She only wondered why the best of women had such limits set to their intellects. This was a Calvinism within Calvinism indeed, and preached by a gentle old English lady with no wish to hurt a fly. The doctrine of election to happiness instead of grace.

'“Never happy unless we have husbands,” and she condemns so many of the best of us to unhappiness without a misgiving. Yet she hopes and prays that I may prove among the elected few. I ought to be grateful for that.'

'Well, if I am not happy, at least I am cheerful. You must give me credit for bearing up pretty well,' she said good-humouredly, while she watched the old lady

laying her knitting in the work-basket and spreading over it a dainty satin covering. All she did was neat and graceful; and some of the stricter of the old people in the village thought that the pretty lace caps she wore were indications of a worldly mind, although the more charitable set them down (with other failings) to her English upbringing.

'But you are charming, and that is what you would have been if you had remained an old maid to the end of the chapter, and what I should never be, were I to be married to-morrow.'

'Ah, you flatterer! you are fishing for compliments,' was the reply. 'Don't you know as well as I do that your bright face is a pleasure to look on? But as for happiness, my poor lassie, you don't even know what the word means.'

'All the more praise to me then for keeping a bright face,' she retorted.

'And without even a cup of tea to refresh you! Ah, when will Mr. MacDowall bring in his "Remnant"? I told Jessie to have the tea ready by five, and it must be far later now.'

'I see him coming up the garden, the "Remnant," as you call him. He will be rather surprised to find me here, as I left him at the Rocky Bay an hour ago.'



CHAPTER VI

ONLY 'JANE'

It was a pleasant picture that met the young man's eyes when he was ushered into the parlour. Mrs. MacDowall had a genius for making a room look nice. She had pots of ferns and baskets of bright flowers in unexpected corners. Cosy arm-chairs stood beside the little sparkling wood fire, and an air of refinement and distinction was given to the homely manse walls by the miniatures and relics of the Everinghams which she had brought with her from her old home. An old-fashioned piano stood open, with books of manuscript music bound in morocco, and showing the coat-of-arms of her family gilded on their sides. Her guitar with its cluster of gay ribbons hung upon the wall over the dainty cabinet, with its useless burden of books of beauty and picturesque annuals mellow in brown and gold.

The mistress of the house, small yet stately, held out a kind hand to greet him, and smiling at her side, look-

ing the picture of health and comeliness, sat the very person of whom his thoughts were full.

Her hat was off, and her crisp curly hair roughened by the wind added another charm to her face, which was slightly flushed by the talk and laughter with her old friend, and her grey eyes were still dancing with fun. Her eyes were of that grey which looks blue when they deepen or flash.

'A bright face,' Mrs. MacDowall had not been wrong in calling it. And as she sat trim and upright in her suit of rough blue serge, there was undoubtedly something about her which might take a young man's fancy.

'Miss Frederick tells me you have met before,' said Mrs. MacDowall in her pleasant voice. 'And I am glad that you will be able to see her safely home since she has, so fortunately for us, had the misfortune to lose the first train. I am still old-fashioned enough to be nervous about young ladies travelling alone.'

'I shall be delighted,' said Millie, conscious as he spoke that this was the first time he had shaken hands with Miss Frederick, even while he answered the elder lady.

'It is not a very perilous journey,' said Jane, 'but a companion is pleasant now that it grows dark. I only hope my mother will not think of waiting tea for me. It was stupid of me to loiter and make myself late. Did you go much farther?'

'Only as far as the next point,' he answered in his soft pathetic voice that made all he said so curiously like his preaching. 'I watched that steamer on its way, and when I lost sight of it I turned back. There is a strange fascination about all that coast, is there not?'

'I am glad you feel that too,' she said eagerly; 'so many people think it only bleak and rugged, they don't know what one means when one calls it beautiful. They consider Castle Hamilton "so pretty," and scorn the charms of Harbour Head.'

"'Harbour Head'—who is speaking of Harbour Head?' said a cheery voice at the door as Mr. MacDowall came in, glad to see 'little Jane,' as he called her, and with a hearty clap on the shoulder for Millie, whose quick ears had caught with some disappointment Miss Frederick's Christian name.

"'Jane,' only 'Jane.' It might have been worse.' So he consoled himself while talking intelligently to the old minister, and seeming to listen to his somewhat long-winded stories. 'It might have been worse. She might have been "Jessie," or "Annie," or even, oh horrible! "Lizzie." Jane is a queen's name, in Scotland at least—"the fairest and the freshest young flower." It has a little majesty of its own.'

At the cosy tea in the dining-room, to which they were presently summoned, he found himself seated opposite to her. The lamp which had been lighted in

deference to the gathering shadows shone brightly on the prettily arranged table, the quaint well-worn silver, the ancient cups. There was over all an air of refinement, an atmosphere of gentleness, in which the young man felt himself expand. Mr. MacDowall, to be sure, was rough and weather-tanned, yet he came of an old Galloway stock, and there was nothing vulgar in his plain simplicity.

Henry Millie enjoyed the homely chat that went on round the table. He was naturally of a frank and open mood, and it was not difficult to him to take the tone of his companions. He revelled in the difference there was between Mrs. MacDowall's manner to him, kind and motherly without a thought of condescension, Miss Frederick's gay rejoinders, and the minister's hearty laughter as he told them some amusing traits of character he had lately observed,—between all this and the sort of treatment to which he was accustomed.

The stiff patronage of the mothers of his flock, the ridiculous giggling of the daughters, above all the idea that seemed to fill the female mind in Lochtown that the young minister had always some hidden meaning in his words, irritated him exceedingly.

'I am supposed to be either "taking them off" or "paying them attention,"' he told himself. 'I cannot even remark on the weather without causing a flutter or a bridle. If they would only be themselves, good,

honest folk as they are, and let me have worship with them, and take a bit of supper, and come away in peace.'

Here he felt himself on a different footing, and, poor lad, enjoyed the contrast to the utmost.

His eyes brightened, his words, always well-chosen and accurate, seemed to flow from him in epigrams. It would be no exaggeration perhaps to call his talk brilliant as he answered Miss Frederick's questions about the latest minor poet. She had asked him frankly from whom he had quoted some lines that had taken her fancy in that sermon she had heard, and Mr. and Mrs. MacDowall both listened with interest to the little sketch he drew in a few graphic word-touches.

'No one ever asked me such a question before, you know,' he said apologetically with a somewhat wistful smile, as he paused. 'But it keeps up one's own interest in sermon-making to try to find something worth hearing to put into them.'

'And once in a hundred years the right listener may come in,' said Mrs. MacDowall sweetly.

'And that makes it worth while,' said the Covenanter, with a flash of gratitude from his dark eyes, which, the old lady (a youthful coquette at heart) said later, almost took her breath away.

'Only it was directed at the wrong person,' she made haste to add; 'but modesty is after all a charm in a young man.'

Jane listened and, in her impulsive way, felt at once glad that she had been able to cheer him and half ashamed that her presence should be of any importance.

'I don't like making a fuss,' she thought.

The twilight had fallen by the time that tea was over, and the soft darkness, lighted only by some bright streaks in the western sky, confused the colours of the flowers that Jane was gathering to carry to her mother with Mrs. MacDowall's love.

The kind lady stood in the doorway, watching the younger figure as it moved among the plots and bushes silhouetted against the brightness. Her old eyes filled with tears as she saw Jane stepping to and fro, recalling the dear daughter she had lost, who might have been moving about her doing little kindly acts of duty 'sweet and serviceable,' if such had been Heaven's will.

Her husband came behind her from the study with the young minister, for whom he had been seeking out a book on his old well-beloved subject, 'The Antiquities of Galloway.' He folded the soft shawl more closely round her shoulders, and chid her gently for her imprudence in facing the evening air.

'Now, Jane my dear, it is time you were off. Here's Millie ready to escort you, so you'll excuse me coming with you.'

And with hearty parting words and invitations to return very soon, the old pair dismissed their guests.

They stood arm-in-arm watching till Jane and her companion disappeared down the steep dip of the hill, then turned and went into the manse, happy as they had been for well-nigh fifty years in each other's faithful love.

CHAPTER VII

MIGNONETTE

MEANWHILE Jane with a light step went down the hill, her bunch of flowers shedding a sweet odour around her. Henry Millie followed her—for the path was too narrow to admit of their walking abreast—his ancient folio under his arm.

‘See the moon rising there above the cliffs,’ said Jane, turning backward as she spoke, ‘and the few stars. How charming the air is to-night, and the faint smell of the sea and the flowers!’

‘It is all delicious,’ said the young man fervently, half hearing what she said, but sure of the heavenly night.

‘If it could only be always like this,’ he said, as they walked soberly along the road to the station. ‘These half-lights lend such a charm to everything, one feels one’s very voice hushed to match the soft hush of Nature. One could be, or do, one’s best in a world of half-tones; it is only in full daylight that one is so inadequate.’

'Gainst noonday glare
You count the streaks and rings.'

'But it must sometimes be full daylight,' said Jane stupidly, as she felt, but with the sense that some remark was expected from her.

'Of course,' he said eagerly; 'still I suppose we all feel the charm of this sort of atmosphere.'

'The West is tender, hardly bright :
How gray at once is the evening grown—
One star, its chrysolite !'

'I feel it,' said Jane, 'but I cannot remember the words that express it as you do; I only feel a sort of hungry love for this soft, sad kind of evening. Those green dull woods at the Rocky Bay are my embodied poetry I often think, the most romantic part of my life.'

'And so many people have no romantic part whatever. Not a thought beyond the things they buy and sell, and eat, and drink. One does not need to waste pity on them for prosaic surroundings, for they wish for no others. They seem positively to revel in having things vulgar and commonplace.' He sighed the short sigh of impatience.

'Yet some of them are good people,' he went on, encouraged by Jane's look of sympathy; 'they could give us lessons in patience and in love to God. But one wonders what they expect or wish eternity to be

like. Are we never to have any wider scope than we have here for our spirits and our souls? Do you remember that poem of George MacDonald's (it is the first part of "The Disciple," I think, and changed—and not improved to my mind—in the last edition; but I knew it first as "A Boy's Grief"). Oh! how does it go?

' I do not care for singing psalms ;
 I tire of good men's talk ;
 To me there is no joy in palms,
 Or white-robed, solemn walk.

' I love to hear the wild winds meet
 The wild old winds at night,
 To watch the starlight throb and beat,
 To wait the thunder light.

You know, he thinks heaven would be very dull; he dreads the prospect—

' A pillar in the house of God,
 And never more go out !

Of course one sees the crudeness and immaturity of the boy's idea of heaven, and the unfairness of the contrast he draws between its joys and the delights of Nature, "the sunny, breezy morn," "the glowing noon," even "the silent heath forlorn, the wan-faced waning moon." But really the views of some of the good people I know are not ill represented. They seem to think they will be comfortably settled for ever in one of the many mansions, and one can't help supposing they imagine heaven a sort of glorified Lochtown. Else how they

can face with complacency being taken by death from their snug dwelling-places here, I can't imagine. What are any of us to do among the immensities? Doesn't it take away one's breath?'

'My knowledge of that life is small;
The eye of faith is dim;'

quoted Jane shyly.

'Yes, for us all, I suppose, that is the only stand-by,' he assented.

' 'Tis enough that Christ knows all,
And we shall be with him.

There is comfort in that thought, but what a terrible, magnificent comfort. It is difficult to feel reassured. Don't you sometimes wonder, Miss Frederick,' he said, pausing on the road before they entered the lighted station, 'how we live so contentedly as we do? Is it because we are brave, or only unthinking, that we take the hope of immortality, or the fear of it, so utterly stolidly?'

'Partly both,' she said; 'we have a little courage and a great deal of unconcern; and some have simple faith as well,' remembering her mother, who was both brave and hopeful.

Millie looked at her eagerly, but made no further remark as he held open the wicket to let her pass on to the wooden platform.

The train was standing waiting in the restful fashion characteristic of that countryside, and Jane went at once to seek a suitable compartment.

'I go third-class,' she said smiling. 'I hope you are not shocked, as a worthy Canon of the Church of England once was on this very platform. "Then I will say good-bye," he answered, when I said so to him, and the solemn goose actually fled from me, and spoke to me no more!'

He opened a door silently and held her flowers for her as she mounted. She did not know whether he had understood her little story.

'May I come with you?' he asked, when he saw her comfortably settled.

'If you don't wish to smoke, I certainly hope you will come.'

So he sprang in quickly and shut the door.

A sudden feeling of shyness came over Jane as she heard the decided bang. After all she was not so very old, and had lived such a quiet life that she had seen but few strangers in the course of it. She could not think of anything to say. The intimacy of their conversation had been broken, and she had no great store of small-talk.

'May I see your book?' she began after a pause, which threatened to grow embarrassing. 'Oh! *Antiquities of Galloway*. But are you interested in them?'

'Why, yes,' said Millie, 'I think I am. At all events,' more confidently, 'Mr. MacDowall told me I should find the book worth looking over, and he seemed pleased when I asked him to lend it to me.'

'I used to love it when I was young,' she said, turning over the pages eagerly in search of old favourites among the illustrations; 'but our copy was tattered: I did not recognise this noble-looking volume. The old days in Galloway must have been more exciting than the new ones are. Lochtown has grown so dreadfully unpicturesque——'

'Do you ever feel that you could have made a good abbot, Mr. Millie? Those pilgrimages to Whithorn, when the kings came from Edinburgh with their queens and a great train of lords and attendants, and the Galloway gentry rode out to meet them, and the abbots on their palfreys ambled along at the king's right hand, must have been very nice breaks in life. I wish we could have such pageants nowadays!'

'Don't tempt me to say I regret the Middle Ages,' said the young man, smiling, 'though to be sure the path of a churchman must have been pleasant enough, and those old abbeys appeal to one's taste in many moods. I am afraid I am not naturally of a contending spirit.'

'One tires of the protestant attitude sometimes, and you are a protest against so many people.'

'Almost every one,' he said quaintly ; 'and the worst, or perhaps the best, of it is that historically I am right, at least I am satisfied my position is tenable, but practically I am a little lonely.'

He spoke in a voice that was meant to be cheerful, but ended in a rather plaintive key.

'I suppose every one who keeps up any sort of distinctive testimony must be so,' said Jane wisely ; 'it is the same in our church to some extent. And then, if there were no religious, there would always be social distinctions, you know.'

'But don't the one sort flow from the other?' he asked. 'It would be social death to any one to join my church, so low have the Covenanters fallen.'

'Oh, surely not,' said Jane interested.

'But indeed I assure you it is so. And I can't console myself with the Apostle in remembering that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." I hope it is not the want of gentlefolk that I mind so much. But they are not very noble-minded, those hearers of mine, nor are they particularly poor and humble. They are prosperous in their own way, and self-satisfied and worldly as well.

'Oh ! I daresay I should not say this to you, but if you knew how seldom, yet it is literally true, I have a chance to speak to an intelligent person, you would forgive my boring you like this. My people think

themselves pretty nearly perfect, and are content and happy, and suppose that my lot is half-way at least to Paradise. I sometimes wonder if I don't do more harm than good. They need some one to speak plainly to them, and I am not brave enough, nor strong enough for the work. We wrap ourselves proudly in our noble past and think we are better than our fellow-men, and God knows it's a ghastly delusion.'

Jane's heart beat with sympathy for the poor young fellow who was clasping his hands with eagerness as he hurried out his sorrows. The train was going softly through the darkling moors, they two alone in the carriage, and she unused to such confidences. The mignonette that lay on her lap made a sweet air about them, and the scent of it associated itself henceforth with the dark face and pleading eyes that were gazing into hers.

'It is all very perplexing,' she said softly. 'Life seems so difficult for some, and so sweet and easy for others. Perhaps we'll get wider ways to walk in somewhere else.'

'Ah, in another world,' he said with an impatient movement.

'Oh, I don't know where or how, but let us wait and try to do our best.'

She felt how weak her words were, but patience was her sheet anchor.

'And believe we are of use at our posts, even protesting against all the world and each other,' he said with a sudden bright smile.

'And here is Lochtown again,' as the small suburban gardens came slowly past the windows. 'I wish I could tell you what a comfort, what a strength this—this has been, I shall never forget it—never.'

They had alighted on the platform now, and Millie looked at Miss Frederick wistfully. 'I have a meeting to go to at the other end of the town, or perhaps you would have allowed me to walk with you?'

'I have a very short way to go,' she answered; then something impelled her to add, 'Would you care to come and see us some day? My mother is noble-minded, you could be on the highest heights with her. I am sure you would like my mother.'

He did not answer for a moment. He was afraid lest his voice should betray him.

'I'd like to come awfully,' he answered. 'It is awfully kind.' And the school-boy words were better than eloquence.

'Good-night,' said Jane, going briskly home.

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW EXPERIENCE

JANE sat long that night over the fire after her mother, whose health demanded early hours, had gone to bed. She had recounted all her small adventures of the afternoon, with dutiful fulness of detail, and lastly, how she had invited the 'Remnant' (a quaint little nickname that had taken her fancy) to come and see them.

Rather to her surprise the idea was not very enthusiastically received by Mrs. Frederick. 'Yes, my dear, I daresay it was right, I am sure you meant to be kind ;' but, with a little dryness, 'Has he not his mother, what ails him at her? I have always heard her spoken of as a very nice person, your Aunt MacLure has a good opinion of her, I believe.'

'I am sorry if you don't like it,' said Jane, who was quite unaccustomed to have any of her doings questioned, and felt a little hurt at this shadow of a doubt of her wisdom. 'I think you will like him, mother; Mrs. MacDowall and he seem very good friends. I forgot

that he had a mother. I don't think she can be with him now at all events, for he said nothing about her. If you had seen him and heard him, your heart would have pitied him, I am sure—but I am sorry.'

'Very likely you are right dear,' said Mrs. Frederick, half ashamed already of her hinted reproof. 'I know I am far too stupid and slow about making new acquaintances. Only we never have known any of these people.'

'And you don't know what my Uncle Frank would say to you, whereas I know perfectly. He would lift his eyebrows and say, "'Pon my word, Mary, this is going too far. It is positively monstrous." And I thought I was doing quite a nice kind thing, forgetting what a proud old aristocrat I had at home to find fault with me.'

Jane smiled and kissed her mother's hand in mock contrition, that mother whose tender heart was only too glad to be convinced her child was right.

'Oh well, perhaps I shall like him,' she said, 'and if you think it a duty—but young men are so apt to presume, and sometimes it is difficult to draw back.'

'But he's nice, mother, I am sure he is. Have I ever shown too much love for presuming young men, or young men of any kind, that you should take alarm so easily. Believe me, you'll be much fonder of him than I shall ever be. And if he presumes, why, he shan't presume here more than once.'

It was quite true that Jane was less fond of

the society of young men than her mother was. Perhaps those specimens of the class to be met in Lochtown were not very attractive. Mrs. Frederick was kind and indulgent in her gentle way to the sons of Aunt MacLure, when they occasionally visited her. The elder of the two was tenant of a large farm about half a dozen miles from Lochtown, and often came to call on his uncle's widow, and in summer Mrs. Frederick and Jane would spend a long day with him and his wife. Archie MacLure was an honest, uncultured young man, who, when she first grew up, had taken it into his head that his cousin Jane was the only girl who could ever make him happy. Jane had not thought so, and her Aunt MacLure had not loved her any the more, first for having proved attractive to Archie, and next, for having refused his proposal.

Then John MacLure, her second son, had shown signs of a similar fancy for 'that poor girl, Jane Frederick, who is really to be pitied, brought up so absurdly by her mother, a good little body, but just full of ridiculous notions'; and Jane had rather shrunk from his attentions during the last visit he had paid to Cairndrum, when he had developed a liking for walking into Lochtown, to have tea with his relatives there.

John was a junior partner in his father's business in Glasgow, and though he still lived at home in the comfortable, handsome house in the West End, of which his

mother was pardonably proud, he was quite able to set up an establishment for himself, as soon as he could find 'a nice girl to look after him.'

He was a jovial teetotaller of a thoroughly commonplace appearance and character; a good honest fellow like his brother, suited, it must be owned, to make an admirable husband.

Jane knew she ought to like her cousins—and she did like them pretty well—at a distance—but it was one of the things in her lot for which she felt the most lively gratitude, that her Aunt MacLure lived in Glasgow and not in Lochtown.

Mrs. Frederick, like all of her simple-minded generation, enjoyed the little breeze and stir created by the presence of a man in the house, and was glad to be hospitable to her husband's nephews, particularly to John, in whom she thought she saw a slight resemblance to his uncle and namesake. She had not ventured to say this to Jane, who was inclined to laugh at her cousin, but it gave another warmth to her own reception of the young man.

She also liked the young doctor, Alfred Foster, who attended her, and believed firmly in his skill, Englishman and stranger though he was, for had he not a right to the best practice in the town, being the heir, though only in the second degree, of Dr. Frederick.

She was a staunch and tender friend, this mother of

Jane, to any person or thing that was connected with the romance of her married life, and sometimes mourned in secret over her daughter's lack so far of any such romance—yet such is the inconsistency of human nature, especially of feminine human nature—that her jealousy (a quality no one had suspected in her) was roused, the first time that Jane had stretched forth even her little finger in initiative to any young man.

'Mamma is so simple,' said Jane to herself; 'she thinks that I am deeply interested in Mr. Millie. And I am not sure that I even like him at all.

'Yet his voice is so "plangent," I never heard any voice before that came up to my ideal of "plangent." He seemed happy at the MacDowall's, poor youth! There is no doubt that his talk is much more intellectual than what we are accustomed to hear. But I wonder if it was a sort of "spate" of talk which had been kept in for a long time. It was so clear cut (though that's not very like a spate), more like an essay that had been prepared beforehand than an ordinary tea-table talk. I wonder if he feels silly now, as if he had made an ass of himself!

'Oh! I am proud, I can't bear to have people fumbling about me and my doings. I wish I had never gone near his church. Having admired his sermon makes one half inclined to dislike him. Now if I don't go again, he will think I am offended, and perhaps ask

me to explain myself, and if I do go, my mamma will look piteous, and be afraid it is her duty to consent to my strange fancy.

‘And all this about the great Jane Frederick who is so able to keep herself to herself. And so she is—and so she shall be.

‘But after all he had rather an engaging smile, and I liked the way in which he said he’d like to come and see us *awfully*. I don’t think a Covenanter ought to say *awfully*. Well I ought to go to bed I suppose.’

She drew up her blind and looked down into the small silent street. High overhead the stars were shining very clear and bright. A rather dim gas-lamp shed its light across the road, and on the footway opposite a dark figure was walking slowly. The red bowl of a pipe came out of the unlighted shadow, and the gas fell on the smoker’s face as he passed. He turned his head with a quick glance across the road.

It was the Covenanter!

Jane turned out her light and jumped into bed with a laugh and little rush of hurry at her heart.

She was only mortal after all.

And this certainly was a new experience!

CHAPTER IX

'LOVE IS IN THE AIR'

SHE woke with a feeling of wellbeing, vague but exhilarating.

'I remember now,' and she smiled as she dressed. 'Could he possibly have been so silly as to come on purpose to look at our house? Perhaps he wished to make sure of the number before he came to pay his state call. He could not possibly have recognised me at all events, I am certain of that.'

'Extraordinary lad!'

She went downstairs singing in a merry voice, and with unconscious irreverence one of the Psalms she had heard in the little kirk, then remembered that her mother might be shocked, and stopped her song abruptly. She opened the door of the dining-room, and there was the usual morning picture of peace. Her mother seated in the sun, the canary in his cage by the window whistling his bravest, and the tea-urn steaming cheerfully on the table. Mrs. Frederick had a letter in

her hand, from which she looked up with a rather anxious face as her daughter came in, all bright with health and happiness.

'Oh! Jane, dear, I have got rather startling news,' lifting her cheek for her darling's kiss. 'A letter from——'

'Not from Uncle Frank, mother; we had one only last week.'

'No, not from your Uncle Frank, but from some one who, I think, is the son of your Uncle Reginald. He signs himself "Francis Maxwell Hay," my father's name, and I think he must be Reginald's eldest son. Look at the letter, dear, and tell me what you think of it. I am so stupid at reading a strange hand, that I have hardly made out the meaning. Your Uncle Reginald died long ago, you remember. He was killed in the Mutiny, and I have heard very little about his widow and his little boys.'

This was the letter that Jane now read.

— HOTEL, LONDON.

MY DEAR AUNT—Will you excuse a total stranger who addresses you in such a familiar style, and admit me to the privileges of a nephew? I have spent the greater part of my life in India, as I daresay you may have heard from my uncle, Mr. Francis Hay, and now, after a continuous absence from England of ten years, have returned to find myself almost unknown. My dear mother and her

sisters have all passed away since I was last in London, and I feel myself extremely friendless. It would give me much pleasure to make acquaintance with you and your family, and I hope to do so in the course of a week or two, as I mean to come up to Scotland to see the scenes of my father's birth and boyhood. Meanwhile, looking forward to an early visit to Galloway, I remain, faithfully yours,

FRANCIS MAXWELL HAY.

'Well,' she said, anxiously waiting for Jane's verdict, 'what do you think of it? Is it not a good letter?'

'Ye-es,' said Jane doubtfully. 'I think it is. The writing is very good. Perhaps the wording is a little stiff, but I daresay he did not know any more to say. It has an official dignity about it that I rather admire. Uncle Reginald had a boy, I suppose, mother? This is not an impostor hastening to claim the honour of being your nephew?'

'Oh no! there was one little boy. Indeed I think there were two, and the last one died. It is shamefully stupid of me not to remember about them, poor little fellows. And Reggy was a great man for keeping up old customs. He would be sure to call the eldest "Francis Maxwell." He says his mother is dead, does he? Frank ought to have let me know. However, he is very little in London, and I don't suppose Lady Millicent would trouble herself much about Reggy's wife. She was of some well-known Indian family—but

there, I am so stupid about names, I shall remember it by and by. Now let us come to breakfast, my dear, the fish must be quite cold.'

'What was the name?' she lamented gently, while she poured out tea. 'I have certainly lived too long in this vegetating way when I cannot remember the name of my own brother's wife. An Indian family I am sure she came of.'

'An Indian family! Mother, you don't mean a native, do you?' said Jane, who was prepared for anything, and prided herself on her breadth of sympathy.

'My dear,' said the mother, shocked but amused (she could not help enjoying rare signs of fallibility in her wise Jane), 'what puts such foolish ideas in your head? Your Uncle Reginald was the most particular of us all, the most unlikely to do anything unusual. Her father was the Calcutta partner in a great firm of merchants, and she was staying in his house, most providentially, at the time the Mutiny broke out, with this little boy, I suppose. Lambourne, I think, was her name, but I shall write to your uncle to-day and make all inquiries.'

'And to my cousin, won't you write to my cousin, the nabob? I am quite excited at the prospect of seeing him. He doesn't tell us what he is, a soldier, a civil servant, or a merchant. He can't be very young now, can he? Quite a small boy at the Mutiny, was he?'

'He must be over forty, I should think,' said Mrs. Frederick, making painful calculations, 'and if he is like Reginald, he should be a handsome man.'

'Like all "the handsome Hays"; but if he is like his mamma—oh! I beg her pardon, she was not a lady of colour, a begum, a ranee, after all. Anyhow, if he is like his mamma or his Cousin Jane, he may be rather plain.'

'“A healthy child, but no beauty,” as old Cousin Marjory said of you,’ quoted Mrs. Frederick merrily. She also was pleased at the thought of seeing her nephew. It would be an amusement for the child, and—who knows—if he proved to be thoroughly good, and took a fancy to his cousin, might she not be glad to see her daughter (how quickly thoughts run on) bear her own dear mother’s name, and adorn once more in Galloway the style of Mrs. Francis Maxwell Hay? So the day began very pleasantly and auspiciously for the Fredericks.

An event like this arrival of the cousin’s letter is epoch-making in Lochtown. I feel that it gives a wrong idea altogether of the course of life in that town to allow you to consider the series of days I have been describing as characteristic of the place. Jane would tell you (to use a favourite adjective) that they are quite ‘phenomenal,’ but there are times in the history of men and nations which are exceptional, and we have hit upon such a time in the life of Jane and her mother.

'Blessed is the people,' we are told, 'that has no history.' And here is one good thing to be said for Lochtown. When an event does happen, like this of the letter's arrival, there is ample time to discuss and consider it in all its bearings, to roll it as a sweet morsel under the tongue. There was absolutely no reason why Jane and her mother should not sit from morn to night talking the letter over if they were so minded. There are no outside calls to action in Lochtown, or so few as to be easily ignored and set aside for a day.

To over-driven people that may seem to describe a state of things like Paradise, yet I fancy they would soon have enough of it, and gladly bend their backs for the burdens they profess to wish to get rid of.

Pity that things cannot be more mixed in this world? All the plums in one part of the pudding and nothing but flour and suet elsewhere is not a good arrangement.

Breakfast and prayers being over, and the newspaper glanced through, Mrs. Frederick had a whole day before her in which to consider the letter she meant to write to her brother, for not even Jane's influence could persuade her to write to the unknown 'Francis Maxwell Hay' without the sanction of the family oracle, 'Uncle Frank,' who must pronounce on the genuineness of the stranger's claims.

'But, dearest mother, why should he be an impostor,'

pleaded Jane in his behalf. 'What could he gain by imposing on you and me? He will think you rather a cold-hearted aunt, I am afraid, if you don't answer his letter.'

'Not without consulting your uncle,' she persisted. 'I shall bid him telegraph, if you like. Yes,' with pride at her own boldness, 'I shall ask him to telegraph if it is all right.'

'You are very clever,' said Jane approvingly. 'My mamma is a woman of the world, and I am now going, with her permission, into the back garden to see how my flowers are looking.' She went off with a light and dancing step, her head also in a little dance of agreeable thoughts.

She went up and down the narrow walks among her flowers, tying up a chrysanthemum, plucking an aster or a geranium which was overblown and spoiled the trim beauty of the bed, and thinking all the while more of what she had seen last night from her window than even of the promised advent of the stranger cousin. The 'Remnant' (how fond we all are of a nickname!) was a tangible fact, to be dealt with first, in leisurely Lochtown fashion, before 'mother's impostor' came over the horizon.

'Poor thing, poor thing,' she mused. 'If he were really there on purpose, what an ass he must be!' And yet—— The sun was shining very brightly this

morning, the air was soft and sweet. And Jane broke into a happy lilt, as was her custom as she went to and fro, and this was the song she sang. I don't know that it was very apposite, but it came to her lips often when she was in a joyous mood.

Though trees grow black and bare,
 Yet Love is in the air ;
 Though trees grow bare and black,
 Sweet pleasance doth not lack,
 For Love is in the air,
 Ah ! Love is fair.

Though wintry skies are red,
 And all the leaves are dead,
 Though frost and ice-band come,
 Frank Love is never dumb ;
 ' Ah ! Love,' he said,
 ' Winter's time to wed !'

There was a large apple-tree in the middle of the garden, on which red apples were hanging. Jane would have made a pretty picture had any one been there to paint her as she stood, imprudently enough, with her uncovered hair softly ruffled by the breeze, one hand upstretched to pluck the apples, the yellow leaves dropping upon her dress and on the green turf that spread around the tree. Pigeons flew past her, one less timid settled on her shoulder—a dove of Venus—as she hummed her song of love—

For Love is in the air,
 Ah ! Love is fair.

Then, having finished her morning round, she went into the house and sat soberly down to read.

But the fresh brightness of the day had made her restless.

'I shall go to the pier, mother,' she said, 'to see the steamer come in, I don't feel able to settle to Freeman's *History of the Norman Conquest* to-day. Eadward the King and Godwin the Earl, must excuse me for once.' As was mentioned at the beginning of this story, the arrival twice a day of a steamer was the great fact of Lochtown life, an exciting incident, to the importance of which Jane Frederick (who considered herself impervious to much) was yet not insensible.

The harbour was as uninteresting, I suppose, as any harbour could be made. For with a shore of any sort and a sea to beat against it, there must always be a certain amount of charm and life. Here, however, the charm was well kept in check, for trains and trucks went right down almost to the end of the breakwater, and an atmosphere of noise, smuts, and coal-dust, courageously contended with the lap of the waves and the fresh scent of the sea.

Still, if you went straight to the farthest extremity of the pier, and turned your back resolutely to the town, and the third-class carriages, and looked over the dancing waters through the opening between the headlands, to the open sea, you could forget what lay behind you.

Gulls dived and dipped bravely among the waves, fishing boats like great brown birds came cutting their way swiftly home ; the steamer with throbbing screw stole up the loch, its red funnels making a bright note of colour to contrast with the white lighthouse at the point. Dark cliffs melting into soft green shores, blue waters mirroring the blue morning sky, the cry of the seabirds, the flash of their wings. And the dulness and dustiness of the little town, and the shrill voices of its inhabitants as they wrangled and dug for bait into squalid clay pools, might be forgotten for the nonce. By an effort. Jane Frederick loved to make the effort, and reconcile herself with the place of her birth. It is so much happier to be happy and content.

CHAPTER X

ANNE KENNEDY

ON her way to the pier she perceived on the blank walls which abound in that part of the town a number of newly-posted bills, which she had to read over and over—such is the exasperating insistence of bills.

She was thereby informed that there would be a Pleasure Excursion up the ——shire Coast, Last Trip of the Season, on September 25th, by the Steamer *Princess Royal*. *Princess Royal*, ——shire Coast. ——shire Coast, *Princess Royal*, September 25th. How tired she grew of that fact before her walk was over!

‘Perhaps my cousin the Impostor will be here, and I may have to take him that Pleasure Trip to show him the beauties of his ancestral country. Nasty little man! He can go alone if he is the little prig I imagine. I can’t help thinking of him as a fat little baboo in spectacles. A sort of Uncle Frank without Uncle Frank’s well set-up look. September 25th. We might get rid of him for a whole day.’

Thus considering, she found that her quick steps had almost overtaken the person whom perhaps of all Lochtowners she liked the least, and before she could slacken her pace, the lady had looked round and was smilingly waiting for her. She was all smiles, a little roundabout person with 'such a sweet face,' as those who liked her said. She had different smiles for different classes. To 'dear Jane Frederick,' as she called her in pitying accents, when gently deploring her waywardness, her smile had a peculiarly winning quality, as of one who should overlook a fault and gently woo a wrongdoer back to virtue.

'Ah! my dear,' she said, 'I am *so* glad to see you. I was only this moment contriving how I could make time to see your dear mamma this forenoon. I have something I wish to consult her about, something I know she will be *so* much interested in, connected with our little Home for Destitute Orphans. *Do* you think she will be able for a little visit from me if I am *able* to fit it in, or *ought* I to be content with making you my messenger? Now do tell me frankly, dear, for you and I know how careful we have to be now that our mammas are growing elderly, not to let them be imprudent, and undertake too much, still I *hope* a few words might not overtire her.'

'My mother is perfectly well, thank you,' said Jane, holding her head high, and feeling as unresponsive as she looked. 'I left her busy over a letter, but I daresay that is

finished by this time, and she will be glad to see you.' She hated to hear her own voice, so rude and ungracious; over and over again had she assured herself, it was not a sin in Miss Kennedy to call Mrs. Frederick 'your dear mamma,' and yet with each repetition the phrase seemed more exasperating.

'Then you *think* I may look in,' said Miss Kennedy with a renewed pressure of the girl's unwilling hand. She looked up as she spoke into the pleasant face, now so hard and expressionless, cocking her head to one side like a sparrow, and shaking her fat little shoulders as if they were its ruffled plumage.

'Oh yes,' said Jane, 'you will find my mother in the dining-room.'

'Ah! writing I daresay? always something good and sweet on hand. By the bye, dear, *do* you think you could undertake the cards for the Christmas Pillow Mission, only two hundred and fifty are required; but Dr. Foster tells me I really *must* not overtire myself, even with such pleasant work this year. He begged me only yesterday, "Dear Miss Kennedy, you must give a little thought for yourself as well as for others." So kind of him I thought it, so prettily said.' And the little lady smiled modestly at the recollection. 'One is so thankful I think,' she ran on, 'just to be shown a little piece of work to be done, so easy too, nothing formidable. In the long winter evenings I daresay you are often at a

loss for a little pleasant occupation, and everything must have a beginning. I can give you two or three pretty cards to copy, and then I am sure even you, who are so dreadfully diffident of your own powers, won't find them at all beyond you. As Mr. Millie said the other day to me, "Ah! Miss Kennedy, you judge of all our powers by your own." And so I do. I was not a bit handy when I first began, and I feel sure all you need is a little practice.'

So she babbled, hardly allowing Jane a moment in which to reply.

Anne Kennedy's boldness took away her hearer's breath. Two hundred and fifty cards, on which were to be illuminated texts of Scripture, with unsuitable adornments in red, yellow, and blue, to be handed over to her, as a pleasant amusement for her idle hours!

To her who prided herself among other things on the severity and purity of her artistic sense, and who always read aloud to her mother for at least an hour in the evening!

Jane Frederick! a person for whom occupation had to be purveyed. Before the lightning of her wrath could scathe her companion (and she was glad she had not spoken, as she told her mother afterwards, 'I might have taken her up and shaken her') a diversion occurred. The little lady's face lighted up with a smile of quite new intensity as she exclaimed, 'Ah! there is Mr. Millie, don't let me keep you, dear; I have just a little

word I must say to him, just to thank him for something so precious he gave us last night; *such* a good man he is, and *so* grateful for any encouragement.'

So saying, she gently pushed Jane away, and turned with both hands to meet Mr. Millie, who was now to be seen coming towards them. The girl felt ruffled, angry, disturbed, so it was rather a stormy smile that the young man received, a sort of flash from a thunder-cloud, as he came suddenly upon the lady he admired. He half stopped, hesitated, his face grew shadowed; but Miss Kennedy was too quick for him; her gentle purring was in his ear as she held his hand, and Jane's quick steps went down the road. 'Is she angry?' he vaguely wondered. He had been so glad, so expectant when he saw her before him, and now she had gone, and what was this endless commonplace that Miss Kennedy was pouring out on him?

'So glad to see you, dear Mr. Millie; I thought of sending you just a little word of thanks for the sweet message you gave us last night, but it is so much more satisfactory to see one's friends. It helps one so nicely through the day I often think, just to have a kind word from an earnest, warm-hearted Christian, one who can understand and feel with one. That thought about our life being a pilgrimage I felt so cheering, so original and fresh.'

(Jane disappeared round the corner towards the sea,

as Henry Millie drew himself together after this last remark. 'I can go after her,' he thought, and his face cleared.)

'I am glad I gave you any help,' he said kindly. He rather liked Miss Kennedy. Men, we all know, are not so easily provoked as women, and she seemed a good little body. He was not listening to her now, only had a vague idea that she was saying something benevolent.

'Indeed you are a help to me,' and her smile grew tenderer. 'It is such a comfort to hear the truth proclaimed so fully and faithfully. One only wishes more in Lochtown availed themselves of the privilege. My poor old friend Mrs. Frederick, to whom I am just on my way, and dear Jane, who left me this moment, and stands, I much fear, in need of a softening influence. But we must not despair. As you said last night, the hardest and coldest heart may yet be warmed. I was on the point of begging her to come with me to the meeting next Wednesday when you came up, and she dashed off in her odd way without even good-bye. Such a pity she is so brusque and wayward. I always say there is something nice about Jane at heart, but my friends tell me I see good in every one.'

And, with a soft laugh, Miss Kennedy stopped out of breath with her own eloquence. Millie had listened with what patience he could to this stream of words, but now seized the opportunity of a pause to say a

bewildered 'good morning,' and effect his escape, his temper, as he felt, absurdly ruffled by what he had heard.

'My friends tell me I see good in every one.' What ridiculous words to be spoken in connection with Miss Frederick. That sweet charming face that had shone on him from the shadowy corner of the railway carriage last evening—to be apologised for, that tender heart to be in need of warming and softening. The young man laughed angrily aloud as he sped on his way to overtake her, to ask her the meaning of her clouded look, to do what? to perpetrate what idiotic impertinence that should make her despise him for ever? No, to look humbly in her face only, to offer his homage, to let her see that some one was happy only in the permission to approach her!

Perhaps it was well for Jane's opinion of his sanity that he was stopped in his rush after her. A little girl met him, who stood in his way, and, with the bluntness and plain speech of a true Lochtownner, bade him come at once to see her granny, who was 'terrible bad, and said the minister was to come directly.'

Now Millie had made a rule that anything concerning his people was to come first with him, so without a word he turned with the child and followed her to old Jenny MacMicking's house. He listened patiently to her story, not a new one, of her sufferings from 'the rheu-

matrics,' then standing by her bed prayed for her relief and comfort both of body and soul.

The old woman was not, perhaps, effusively grateful to him for coming so quickly at her call. Old Lochtown Covenanters are not given to gratitude. Was he not the paid servant of herself and her fellow-members?

But at all events she felt she had been treated with proper respect. 'He could not have gone quicker to Bailie M'Murray's, and he aye pits up a braw prayer, I will say that for the lad,' she granted to the next visitor whose presence she commanded, and who was one of the few disaffected members of the flock.

'Aye does he,' sneered this gossip, 'a wheen Papish clavers I'll warrant him, wersh stuff with no a screed of the Scriptur' intill't, and "pisky-pisky Awmen!" "Doon on his knees and up again," nae doot.'

'Ye're wrong then for aince, Maggie, my woman, for as wise as ye think yersel', for it was maistly a' Scriptur' frae end to end, and he stood up as straucht as a rush at the bed-stoop, where ye're standin' yoursel' this meenit.'

'Weel, I'm sure I'm thankfu' to hear ye say sae, Jenny. It's no what could be expectit from some of his pulpit appearances. But I'm glad ye're sae easily pleased.'

I am afraid the minister had forgotten Jenny Mac-Micking and her ills before he had returned to the

manse in his renewed contemplation of the charms and character of Miss Frederick.

He was calmed by the visit to the old woman, and the sense that he had done his duty by her, and he went home glad on the whole that he had been interrupted in his pursuit of his mistress.

'I might have said something foolish,' he wisely told himself; 'that little woman had irritated me so absurdly.' Yet he was not above being disappointed that no vision of her bright face shone upon him at any of the cross streets that he passed. Let to-morrow come, and he might go and see her in her own home in uninterrupted felicity. So he comforted himself and looked forward in hope.

When Jane had also retraced her steps, which she was in no great hurry to do lest she should encounter Miss Kennedy, she found her mother seated at her writing-table with her still unfinished letter before her.

'Why, mammy, you are taking a long time over your new nephew,' she said, coming swiftly upon her mother from behind, and laying a fond arm round her shoulder.

'I am a slow writer,' said the good lady, laying down her pen with a faint sigh, 'and Anne Kennedy was here, poor thing! and I did not like to tell her I was busy. She always seems so glad to hear her own voice, one has not the heart to stop her; and I took my knitting, so the time was not wasted.'

'Oh, mother! I like to hear you call her "poor thing,"' said Jane, sitting down in an arm-chair, and playing with the feathers of her hat, which seized every opportunity to start up in the wrong places. 'She *is* a poor thing—a poor, narrow-minded, cold-hearted, consequential little ass—and she thinks she is the only "true Christian" in Lochtown, except, perhaps, Mr. Millie.'

'She is perhaps a little self-satisfied,' said Mrs. Frederick, whose censure was never very severe, 'but then she means so well, and she does a great deal of good. I admire the way in which she interests herself in benevolent objects. She was full to-day of a Home for Orphans that she is trying to set up. But let me finish this now, my dear, before Fanny comes to lay the cloth.' And so saying she resumed her interrupted task.

'I am glad it is orphans this time,' thought Jane, as she went upstairs in meditation. 'I always wonder what scheme Anne Kennedy will invent next. Orphans sound more rational than the "League for the Gratuitous Distribution of Fireworks on Gunpowder Plot Day," which was her latest fad. No wonder she wishes to hand over her Pillow Card Painting to me if she is taking the charge of all the orphans in the south of Scotland on her shoulders. I should like to know if Mr. Millie really is as fond of her as she makes out. He can't

have much sense if he is taken in by Anne Kennedy, "poor thing" !'

Jane had now recovered her temper (which was naturally sweet), and could afford to smile in the absence of her tormentor.

Her mother was in the drawing-room watering her ferns, the task of letter-writing happily over, when her daughter rejoined her.

'By the way, my darling,' she began boldly, as she moved about the room refreshing her favourites, 'by the way, I have been thinking that I shall not require a new cloak this autumn; my last year's one looks quite splendid as it hangs in the wardrobe.'

'Indeed,' said Jane dryly, 'your last year's one! Your last three years' one I suppose you mean? And who asked your opinion on the matter, if I may venture to inquire? Ah!' with energy, 'the little wretch with her orphans, and her "dear Mrs. Frederick," and her sly pussy-purr. I see what happens whenever my back is turned. Now make a clean breast of it. How much did you give her?'

'I promised her five pounds,' said the gentle widow. 'I had no money in the house, at least not enough, but I said I would send it to her. Yes, darling, I know you are vexed, for you like to waste money on me; but I thought it was my duty to give it. We are far too apt to be selfish, and she told me such a sad story about

some bairns. I could not bear to think they should be hurried off to the poor-house. And she has collected nearly enough to keep them for a year. Truly, dear, even though Anne Kennedy asked for it, I think the money is well bestowed. And you would have been proud if you had heard me saying that it was a sinful waste of time to paint two hundred and fifty cards with texts, when she could get nicely printed ones for the same expense. Besides, she has no right to set a scheme like that going, and then hand it over to my Jane to execute.'

'Which your Jane wouldn't do, even though she could, which is a matter of doubt,' said the daughter, who in her heart was proud of her generous mother, and of the open hand which was ready to dispense to any good cause.

'I daresay you were very bold in my defence, and I don't grudge money to orphans, only I do not see why that little woman should wear a sealskin coat while you have to go shabby.'

'But my cloak looks beautiful; it does indeed; and we are not very dressy people in Lochtown after all.'

'Ah! but the nephew who is coming. I wish you to look nice when you are inspected by Francis Maxwell Hay.'

'Poor fellow! He won't be very severe if he's like his namesake. People used to say the Laird never knew

what he wore. The only thing he cared about was a clean shirt.'

'Well, you have a way of looking nice in old clothes, you know. So we'll hope the Impostor will admire you as your poor old Jane does.'

CHAPTER XI

GEORDIE M'CULLOCH

'It will be only civil to call for Mrs. Frederick this afternoon,' said Henry Millie to himself on the Saturday morning after the late events. Friday, on which he had intended to make his visit, had brought an impossible storm of wind and rain. He felt it would be absurd to arrive in a dripping mackintosh to open an acquaintance, which might as well have been going on for the last five years.

But now, with two completed sermons, he could look forward to enjoying social pleasures with a clear conscience.

There were other people in Lochtown who had planned a Saturday afternoon of amusement for the young man, but he was firm in resisting their blandishments. As he sat over his paper in the study, a timidly deprecating ring was heard at the house door, a soft voice inquired if the minister was at home, and a pair of creaking boots, which contrasted boldly with the

apologetic attitude of their wearer, came along the passage.

'M'Culloch again!' said Millie below his breath; 'what has he got in his head to-day.' He put on as pleasant a look as he could to greet the worthy man, who was indeed somewhat of a trial to his pastor. Not that there was anything wrong about him; indeed, Millie had a sincere respect for some parts of his character, but he sometimes rebelled against the fate which seemed desirous to make him his closest and life-long companion.

Mrs. Frederick had expressed to Jane her fear lest Millie, after the habit of young men, should prove presuming. He suffered too much at the hands of his excellent office-bearers not to make him very chary of thrusting himself in turn upon others. How is one to repel? Has one any right to repel the kindly, if clumsy, advances of those to whom one is tied by so many real bonds as tied Millie to his flock? He was truly eager for their spiritual welfare. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that he would have cheerfully (if not laid down his life) at least lost his right hand, to benefit their souls. But to live in friendly, social, equal intimacy with them, demanded, he was inclined to think, a spirit of more heroic self-sacrifice. He had so very little to say to them in the way of common chit-chat. He could not respond properly to the young ladies'

badinage, which was largely supplemented by the interchange of conversation lozenges, among one section of his people, and took the form of the propounding of abrupt and crude questions on social problems, among a small and more highly educated circle—questions fired off at intervals, and falling like bombshells in the midst of dreadful silence. There was one young lady in particular (the daughter of Geordie M'Culloch, who now, hat in hand, and deprecatory smile on lips, glided into the room) whose questions Millie heartily dreaded.

It is not pleasant for a modest young man to be asked to give an opinion, before a roomful of people, on the Law of Marriage and Divorce in general, with particular application to an unpleasant case which was too much before the British public. Yet Nelly M'Culloch was a good girl enough, and I daresay we might find her plain speech equalled in some very high quarters indeed.

On the whole he preferred the conversation lozenges of the many, to the advanced thought of the few. But to-day it seemed as if they were to be combined.

'Oh, Mr. Millie, I hope I don't disturb you, sir,' said the worthy baker, coming forward with his shrinking air, yet looking round the room with a certain sense of proprietorship, while he refused the chair the minister hastened to offer him, and leaned his hand upon the

study table, whose burden of books and papers was an added glory, showing the learning and industry of the pastor whom Geordie 'sat under.' Were not the well-filled book-presses that lined the walls further testimonials to his education and importance, all reflecting credit upon his attached flock.

'No doubt you are busy with something that will be for our good I humbly hope—our spiritual and everlasting good. We are all sensible of the precious gift we have in you, Mr. Millie, and thankful to the Giver of this and all our mercies,' said the elder, insensibly relapsing into his well-worn 'Grace before Meat.'

'No, I am afraid I am not particularly busy,' said the minister; 'I was only reading the *Scotsman*. However, I got through a lot of work yesterday. What a fearful day it was to be sure! One did not feel inclined to cross the doorstep.'

'Just so, just so, sir,' said M'Culloch briskly. 'That's just what my wife said to me. "The minister will be well through with his preparation," says she, "and able to take the play." It is my daughter's birthday you see, and a good girl she is too, sir, though I say it that maybe shouldn't—a fine, clever lass, and beginning to get forward a little in years, though it's not maybe fair to speak of the ladies' ages—still she's out of her teens now; in fact she would make no secret of it to you, sir, I am sure; this is her coming of age no less.

'Twenty-one to-day, Mr. Millie, and my only child as you know, and so we thought, her mother and me, we would make a little party of it. And such a fine day and all. And we are never happy without the blessing of the Almighty, sir, as you have so often told us.'

'Yes,' said Millie, who suspected what was coming.

'So in short she has set her heart on your coming to ask a blessing on her little picnic, and if you can make it convenient just to join us and a few friends this afternoon at the Rocky Bay, over yonder at Harbour Head, we are all going by the afternoon train, and it ought to be very enjoyable if the beautiful weather holds up, which I think there's every prospect of being the case.'

The good man stopped to draw breath after this long speech, and stood vaguely smiling round upon the minister's library while he awaited his answer. He was thinking of the birthday cake his own hands had compounded in honour of the day, and of the bags of cookies and other dainties which should grace the feast, to which the minister's presence should add the crowning ornament.

But Millie's mind was made up. He would never postpone any spiritual functions for his own delight, but Miss Nelly M'Culloch's coming of age must be celebrated without him. His Saturday afternoon was his

own, and he was not bound to give it up. Some people thought the young man's character lacked backbone, but he stiffened up all the moral vertebræ he possessed and for once said 'No.' The baker's face fell, a dour look came into the corners of his drawn-down mouth, and the brightness of his smile was perceptibly eclipsed.

'Oh! certainly, sir, if you are engaged there is no more to be said. My daughter will be sorely disappointed no doubt. The young people think a great deal of the minister to be sure. Some of them, that is—some of them are not so caring perhaps; but my daughter has been brought up differently. I am thankful to say me and Mrs. M'Culloch has taught her to think none of our joys complete without God's blessing upon them, as I was saying before. But if it cannot be——

'It'll be some of the outlying folk you are thinking to visit maybe; is it no one down the shore way yonder? There's old John M'Millan would be thankful for a call I am sure, and we would not be greedy; but my wife and me, we had set our heart on your asking the blessing when my daughter cut her birthday cake, and if you could join us, were it only for that bit ceremony, why it would be a pleasure to us all. I was just saying to them last night when the thing was spoken of: "The minister is not one that sets himself against our innocent joys; he's no æsthetic to frown upon our pleasures" (as you told us yourself last

Sabbath, sir); "he only longs to share them and make them pure and perfect." But of course if you cannot, you cannot, and there's no use speaking any more about it.'

'I am very sorry, Mr. M'Culloch,' said the young minister turning to poke the fire, which was unnecessary as the day was warm, and the sun filled the room with brightness, 'but I am sure your party will go off quite as well without me, and I have an engagement I should not like to break for this afternoon, at least, which it would be inconvenient to postpone. Wish Miss Nelly, please, everything that is kind from me, long life and health and happiness.'

'Would it be the Adairs at the Clock you were going to?' said the baker, with a sly look out of the corner of his eye at his pastor, who stood, still grasping the poker, 'for I hear they are well through with their trouble of the measles, and the bairns a' rinnin' aboot again, and John himsel' will be throng with the leading the noo' (relapsing into the vernacular as he dealt with homely topics); 'sae if I might suggest, a call wad maybe be mair acceptabler a wee while later in the season.'

He looked at Millie with the modest, humble air, which, the young man had often noticed with amusement, covered an intense curiosity. Now it irritated rather than amused him, but he was accustomed to control his temper, and answered quietly: 'I am glad to hear such

a good account of the Adairs. Mrs. Adair must have her hands full with so many bairns, but she will be thankful to have them well over the measles before the cold weather begins, I daresay. Well, good morning, and don't forget my best wishes for Miss Nelly. Stay, has she seen this I wonder?' and taking up a small volume from the table he wrote hastily on the fly-leaf—

Miss Helen M'Culloch,
with best birthday wishes from H. M.

'There are some splendid things in that,' he said, handing it to the father, who, only half appeased by the small gift, was fain to take his leave.

'H. M.' he muttered, as he went slowly down the street from the manse; 'the minister's gey cautious, he hasna' compromised himself'. "Miss Helen M'Culloch" (reading the inscription as he walked), "with best birthday wishes from H. M." They have the same ineetials the twa o' them; 'sakes I never thocht on that afore. Bits o' poetry I see. It wad hae been mair wiselike to gi'e her a Bible or a Testament or a Psawm Book, but then, nae doot, he kent a lassie brocht up in an elder's hoose bude to hae a' the three; and a bit sang-book is no sae bad as ony fause doctrine of Papish rubbish, like thae Tammas à Kempises and sic-like he aince had sic a troke wi'.'

Meanwhile the minister was standing with his back

to the fire, heedless of the heat which threatened to scorch his trousers—a sure proof of absorption. He was thinking of the pleasures that had been proposed to him, and assuring himself he had done well to refuse.

The very place—the Rocky Bay—to have been sharing a hilarious and friendly cup of tea with Mrs. M'Culloch, perhaps pulling out sixpences and rings from Miss Nelly's birthday cake on the very spot, at the very hour, that had been made charming and sacred by that meeting with *her*. He could not have borne that the spell of romance should be so rudely broken; let him cherish it still as a secret, sweet between them.

He would go now and see the most unattractive person of his acquaintance—an old woman, epileptic and seldom sober, who nominally belonged to the Covenanted flock. And then, with a clear conscience, in the afternoon he might visit her who occupied the opposite pole in his esteem.

Such a hold does the pagan idea of propitiating the gods, lest they should be jealous of man's too great prosperity, yet retain on many of us, of whom Henry Millie is certainly not the worst or the least enlightened!

CHAPTER XII

AFTERNOON TEA

HAD Jane Frederick any expectation of a visit from her new acquaintance? She was early abroad that day, and contrary to her ordinary habit, had taken her usual walk before dinner. She said, and very likely thought, that she did so, because the beauty of the bright morning tempted her out, and she feared lest the clouds should return later in the day. At all events she was at hand to protect her mother from the presumption of young men, when at four o'clock the garden gate was opened and 'Mr. Millie' was presently announced.

He came in with the slight stoop which so many of his calling acquire (presumably in bending over their books), and with a becomingly modest blush upon his pleasant face.

'A very agreeable young man,' Mrs. Frederick, whose good opinion was not difficult to win, afterwards pronounced him. He seemed to be at his best with the gentle old lady. Jane was unexpectedly quiet; she was

watching with considerable interest the sort of impression Mr. Millie would make on her mother. She was surprised to feel herself so much aloof. She had expected, after having had her thoughts a good deal engrossed with the evening spent in his company at Mrs. MacDowall's, with their talk during the railway journey, and the odd vision of him (herself unseen) in the mid-night street ;—she had expected to feel a little fluttered, a little awkward in his presence, perhaps even fascinated by the mysterious power of whose influence, they say, we all are victims once in our lives.

She admired his manly pleasant way with her mother. She thought he looked unexpectedly 'nice,' as he filled her own favourite arm-chair by the fire—and of men who sat in arm-chairs, especially her own, Jane was apt to be critical. She listened to what he was saying to her mother about various matters of interest to the neighbourhood, but on the whole she did not feel that thrill, that stir of the pulses, which she had half hoped for, half dreaded.

Had it been all imagination then? Had there been nothing special in his voice and manner, nothing that might be dangerous in their future intercourse? Or had, perhaps, the sudden flame, if flame there were, died down as quickly as it flashed into being? And if so, were it not better so perhaps?

Just then her mother turned with an appeal to her on

some small point, and Jane looked up and met the young man's eyes.

She gave a little start, she could not help it, at the sudden answer to her questions. She was glad to rise and look for the paper her mother wished, in order to hide the ridiculous blush which she felt (as the novels say) was covering her face from brow to chin.

No! she had made no mistake. There was something in the room to-day that had never been there before. The 'Covenanter' was in earnest, and would sooner or later demand to know what return she could make for his gift. Oh, why had she gone out of her way to invite him to the house? Her mother was right, and she was always wrong. She was not able to respond to a person who looked at her with eyes like those. She was cold, frivolous, inadequate to answer to such a large demand.

She returned with the weekly paper in her hand, and laid it on her mother's lap in silence, sitting down again in the place she had left.

The whole scene might have passed a hundred years since, might be going on for ever; one knows the feeling that comes with a moment of strong excitement. She heard her mother's gentle voice reading the account of a flower-show. 'The display of flowers was very creditable. The first prize for asters was carried off by

John Adair, the Clock, with a most exquisite assortment of blooms.'

'I am glad of that,' said Millie in his pathetic drawl. 'It will encourage him to go on. And Thomas Blair was second, was he not?'

'Yes; I am very thankful that Sir Edward thought of giving those prizes for cottage gardens. It is such a blessing to have anything to amuse the men, and keep them out of the public-house.'

'If we could but get up something to serve the same purpose in winter,' said Millie thoughtfully; 'for the evenings are so long, and the houses not always so comfortable that one can expect the men to stay in them. It is easy for us to blame them for going to the public-houses—we who have our pleasant rooms, and our books, and peace and comfort to read them in.'

So the innocent talk went on between Mrs. Frederick and her visitor, till Jane had recovered her equanimity and rang the bell for the tea-table to be set. Everything was very plain in Mrs. Frederick's house. You did not find white satin tea-cosies, and tea-cloths with gorgeous monograms embroidered in gold; nor were you invited to sit in chairs festooned with lavish draperies of Liberty silk. Japanese spiders did not crawl over velvet mantel-borders and curtains, nor did strings of chenille monkeys descend upon unwary heads from every gas bracket or picture frame.

But the cups from which you drank your tea were very precious to their mistress's heart, bearing as they did the red escutcheons of the Hays upon their slender sides—a bright patch of colour among the delicate gold tracery that was their only other adornment.

Jane poured out the tea and Henry Millie waited on her, happy to see her smile, and enjoying the present moment to the uttermost. His was the poetic temperament that knows itself blest, rather than that which is always unsatisfied. What could he desire more than he at that moment enjoyed? Jane was herself again. She was showing him unconsciously how bright and pleasant she could make life with her appear. She was feeding the kitten which was her mother's pet and hers, and as she knelt on the hearth-rug watching its delight, as it buried its little face in a saucer of cream, she looked up at him with unfeigned pleasure.

Millie felt his heart filled with an almost passionate tenderness, that brought the tears to his eyes. He loved her for her girlish look ; he loved her for her kind ways with man and beast ; he loved her for her unaffected smile. And this was the person for whom Miss Kennedy could only doubtfully hope that her hard heart might yet be softened. He did not know how the time slipped by ; he heard himself talk and laugh, and utter wise sentences that all his congregation might have heard without a murmur. He talked on and

listened and lingered, but the happy hour must pass. He could not stay there for ever. The little clock on the mantelpiece chimed six before he had risen to go.

'It was so kind of you to allow me to come,' he said to Mrs. Frederick as she gave him her hand.

'I assure you it has been a pleasure to see you,' she made haste to reply; 'you must come again. I sometimes think we are not so sociable in Lochtown as we ought to be; but my daughter and I are sad hermits, and one gets into habits of quiet living very easily.'

She laid her hand tenderly as she spoke on her tall daughter's arm.

'Good-bye,' said Jane, standing straight and slim by the bell-rope. 'And I shall be very glad if you can lend me the *Dramatic Lyrics*. I don't know Browning half so well as I should like.'

She must say something frank and friendly to the young man whose visits she had invited.

'Certainly,' he answered eagerly; 'I shall let you have it at once.'

But neither of them looked at the other as they thus took leave.

A malicious fate had decreed that as the minister let the gate of Mrs. Frederick's garden shut behind him, he came face to face with one of his own people, and that no less a person than the widow Neilson, sister to Mr.

M'Culloch the baker, and aunt to the young lady whose birthday tea was even then in progress by the shores of the Rocky Bay.

She was a woman of a sorrowful spirit, whose luxury was grief, and to whom what her brother called 'innocent joys' were the very abomination of desolation. Consequently nothing would have induced her to join in an outdoor festivity such as her niece's proposed picnic. Nevertheless she had enjoyed with keen relish all the preparations and discussions which preceded it, and was quite ready to resent the absence of the minister on such an important event in the family history. 'An engagement.' She had eagerly joined with her sister-in-law in turning over every possible or impossible engagement that Mr. Millie could have had. Happy therefore was the chance that had brought her past that way.

She stopped, and held out a black kid hand before the young man's eyes, still full of the vision he had seen, and in a voice thick with exultation she remarked: 'It's a cold afternoon, sir.'

'Oh! Mrs. Neilson,' he said cordially, 'I am glad to see you able to be out. Fresh air is the best thing for the health.'

'So folk say, so folk say,' said the good lady with a sniff. 'For my part I am thankful to be kept alive so long as it pleases the Almighty to prolong my days,

though for health I cannot say I know much of that. A frail life at the best and a weary one mine has been.

‘But I am glad to see you looking so braw yourself, sir, and so busy as you are kept too. My brother, honest man, was sair pit about this morning, that you didna find yoursel’ free to go to my niece’s bit tea.

‘Though a daftlike thing it seems to me for a wheen well-to-dae folk to gang willingly to catch their death, sittin’ in the cauld win’ among the partans and seaweed—them that has nae need, having a’ guid hooses of their ain to tak’ their meat in.

‘But nae doot ye were better employed, sir, calling upon the gentry inby yonder. Folks say that young leddy of Mrs. Frederick’s no ill-looking, and it’s time she was getting a man; for as braw as she may be, the years winna stand still wi’ her nae mair than wi’ the rest o’ us. Weel, weel, her faither was a weel respectit man in his day, I daur say, though as for skeel, I never heard that he was onything extry in that way. Ye’ll be far ben wi’ the mammaw, I doot not, and her ane of the auld Hays that used to be sae muckle heard of lang syne. No that we ever were behadden to them; no, thank the Lord, the M’Cullochs were aye able to mak’ their ain way in the world. Ay, and can dae sae yet maybe for a’ that some folk are gettin’ their heids up and think themselves sae braw.’

Then with a final toss of her head, and ignoring of

Millie's feeble inquiries after her rheumatism (a malady which was almost the only one of fleshly ills to which the widow did *not* lay claim), she departed, dropping a deep curtsy, the irony of which display of humility was lost on the recipient.

He was too much occupied with his own interesting thoughts to pay much attention to her words or manner. He only felt vaguely that she was a tiresome woman, who rubbed him the wrong way.

Had he not every word, every look, to turn over in his mind, to cross-question for their meaning, to extract from them sweetness and hope? He went along with his head bent, past the football field where an Association Match was raging, the shouts and cries of the lads, the cheers of the supporters of either party, falling upon his unheeding ears. He was longing to be alone, nor did he slacken his steps till he had left the town and its noises behind, and was walking in the sylvan solitude of a neighbouring demesne.

It was as still and breathless in the deserted avenue as a lover's heart could wish. Rabbits stole across the path before him, a yellow leaf from a plane-tree might drop upon his head, but no harsher sounds broke the delicious sequestered peace. He wandered on, going deeper and deeper into the lonely woods, till he came at last to the kernel of the place—an open space of sunny grass where a few scattered stones overgrown with moss

and interspersed with broom bushes and fuchsias, which flourish in the soft, moist air, and one bare arch, are all that are left to show where once a mansion stood.

There is always something pathetic in such remains of what was once a home. And Henry Millie loved to come there and steep his soul in tender regrets over a vanished past. It suited his mood oftenest when he was happy, and he came to it instinctively to-day when his heart was full.

He sat down upon the warm cushions of the moss, and, lighting his pipe, gave himself up to happy dreams. Before him stretched an open space of sunny landscape, with here and there a big tree lifting its yellowing crown into the soft evening air. A pond with wild birds dipping and flying among the reeds gave motion and life to the foreground, and beyond rose a low range of hills, brown with the withered heather and bracken, green also here and there with the dark green of many firs.

Here the worries of life did not enter. Here he could think of the future which he hoped should be so bright. A home for himself—his very own—his wife beside him to sit here on such an autumn evening—laying his hand softly on the moss where she might sit some happy day. His pipe went out as he forgot to smoke, while he imagined how he might put his arm

round her unforbidden, and hear her call him 'love.' She said the word so prettily. She called her mother so with such a natural sweet friendliness.

'Love,' he said it over to himself again and again ; 'love,' as if no one had ever heard the word before, and it was a discovery of his own.

He sat till the sun had set, then rose up with a start as he heard a footfall, and a labouring man, whistling in the twilight, came round the clump of evergreens that hid the ruined arch.

'It's a fine night,' he said cheerily, as he came forward to greet the new-comer.

'Oh, John Henryson, it's you. Can you give me a light? my pipe's gone out.'

'Ay can I,' said the man. 'Is it yoursel', Maister Millie? I didna ken ye the first glisk I got. They'll be for shuttin' the gates sune, I fancy, noo the sun's doon.'

'Is it so late?' said the minister. 'Well, I must make haste ; I am going round the other way. Thanks to you, John. It'll do fine now.' And he went off through the gathering darkness, puffing man's best consoler as he went. The moon rose to light his footsteps home through hedge-lined roads, and under fresh, soft airs. And it was with a happy heart that he lay down to rest that night, full of a secret hope of what to-morrow might bring forth.

He slept soundly till three o'clock, when he awoke

to find himself repeating the words with which he meant to conclude his afternoon discourse.

‘We build castles in the air, and night dreams are our daily idols that we doat on. Salvation, salvation is our only necessary thing.’ Wise and true words of Samuel Rutherford, which yet seemed chill and ominous in the deep blackness before the autumn dawn.

CHAPTER XIII

SUNDAY

OF course it is obvious to the meanest feminine capacity (it is not so easy to answer for men, it is impossible to gauge the density of their perceptions), that nothing short of wild horses could draw Jane Frederick to-morrow to the Church of the 'Persecuted Remnant'! If she is interested in its minister in the very smallest degree, she will avoid it as she would a plague-stricken spot. Unless indeed she should go merely to convince herself that Anne Kennedy's desire for her spiritual good has no power to prevent her own laudable endeavours to further it.

No, no, subtleties and all, I am sure she will not go this Sunday, not unless an angel from heaven should appear on purpose to lead her by the hand, as Tobias is led by Raphael in Botticelli's fascinating picture, where, to be sure, Gabriel with his tall white lily, and Michael armed *cap-à-pie*, are also present to enforce the affable Archangel's will.

No, no, Jane will attend her mother dutifully to church

in the morning, and return alone in the evening to the same well-worn pew, nor will she even cast a glance in the direction of the other church, where an absurdly sanguine young man is—well—perhaps not expecting, but making castles in the air regarding, her possible appearance.

Let us go back a little to relate a conversation that passed between Mrs. Frederick and her daughter on Saturday evening before they parted for the night. No telegram had come from Uncle Frank, and his sister was 'vexing herself' a little as to the meaning of his silence.

'He might have taken the trouble to answer me at once. Perhaps he is out of town. I know Lady Millicent is not fond of London at this time of year, and the letter might have to be forwarded to him, and servants are often careless. Still, I should have liked were it only a word to tell me about my nephew. It seems so unkind and cold not to have answered the poor fellow's letter.'

'Well, love,' said Jane soothingly, 'if no letter comes on Monday morning and no telegram, we may be sure he is all right. Uncle Frank would have hastened to expose an impostor. And if I were you I should write a kind little note to my cousin, one of your own nice letters that every one likes to get, and that will show him you are not a hard-hearted monster. And we need not fall into his arms when he comes if we don't think he looks nice.'

'I can truly promise not to be too friendly. Was I cold enough and stiff enough to Mr. Millie to satisfy you?' she asked, smiling.

'I thought you were very nice to him, and I felt ashamed never to have had the lad to the house before. He was really most pleasant and agreeable.'

'And not presuming?'

'No; I don't think one could call him that.'

'But, mother, do you think me very silly if I say that I am not certain that we should see too much of that young man for our peace of mind.'

'Jane!' said the mother with a little soft cry of doubt, or pleasure, or both.

'I am only warning you,' she said, blushing, 'and after all you see that I am not sure whose peace of mind is in danger. It may be yours, or his, or mine. Only never say I did not tell you in time.'

'He is a good-looking lad,' said the anxious mother, 'and with a well-bred air one does not expect. I wonder if it is possible that he comes of gentle blood. And he is good I am sure, and that is the great thing after all.'

'I suppose it is,' said Jane meditatively; 'yet to be good and bonny are not everything one wants in a husband. One would need to like him "beyond the lave," and we are not that length yet.'

So Sunday, or the Sabbath, as Henry Millie had been taught from infancy to name the first day of the

week, passed over, and Monday dawned on him with a perceptible lessening of brightness. He, being a man, was unreasonably disappointed when there was no Jane Frederick either morning or afternoon. He went, as was his custom, to an extra meeting held in another part of the town in the evening. Miss Kennedy was there of course—her round, puckered visage was a constant element in the gathering—but no one was by her side, no owner at least of a hard heart in need of softening. Millie was thrown back (fortunately in his case the fall was not very far, nor the way unknown) upon the consolations of religion, and his prayer for help for those in trouble and disappointment was no doubt all the more fervent from the personal experience of those distresses. He would gladly have avoided Miss Kennedy on coming out—indeed was prepared to accept Geordie M'Culloch as his companion homewards—but the lady was not to be escaped. She was waiting for him in the little dark entry, and together they descended the flight of wooden steps which led into the dimly-lighted street. Not, however, before Millie had noticed with a sense of surprise that his usually too eager henchman had disappeared without any proposal to join his pastor. 'Has he another birthday supper for Miss Nelly to-night?' he wondered; and then the voice of his admirer was in his ear—her 'pussy-purr' as Jane Frederick irreverently called it.

How bright the stars were overhead ! how rough and uneven the pavement underfoot. But the rush of air from the sea was refreshing after the stuffy atmosphere of the meeting, and the minister was glad that his day's work was over.

With an old-fashioned etiquette, which he had inherited from his father, he offered Miss Kennedy his arm. The streets were ill-paved, and the puddles spread for unwary feet. She took it with a soft purring murmur of deprecatory tenderness ; she was not sure that it was proper to walk so with a gentleman, and was unwilling to suppose that it was on the footing of an aged Christian that he offered her his support ; yet, on the whole, pride and pleasure predominated in her heart as the pair went down the street together.

Two girls stood at a corner eagerly talking to a young man. They stared rudely at Millie and Miss Kennedy as they passed, stopping their chatter for the purpose, and the loud laugh of Lochtown, never very musical, sounded after them.

'She's a gey auld yin he's gotten the night,' said one voice. 'Folk say he's a "deil amang the lassies," was the rejoinder ; 'leave the ministers alane for that.'

'Won't you come in and take a little supper with us, Mr. Millie ?' said Miss Kennedy timidly, when her own door was reached—'mamma would be so pleased I am

sure—and end the day with worship—*such* a privilege for us all.’

Now Millie was a good-natured young man, and as has been already hinted, his character was somewhat lacking in backbone. He was one of those to whom ‘Yes’ is always easier than ‘No.’ So although he was longing to get home to his books and his pipe, not to speak of the glass of beer he allowed himself on Sabbath after his work was over, he had not the moral courage to refuse the invitation. Perhaps the old lady might enjoy an evening talk, and there was no good reason why he should deny it to her. So he followed Miss Kennedy meekly into the hall, and was ushered gaily by her into the dining-room, where her mother sat by the fire.

What a different atmosphere was here to the fresh, flower-scented, yet firelit brightness of Mrs. Frederick’s house!

The old lady sat, as became her feebleness, muffled in an immense Shetland shawl, wearing a widow’s cap, dingy with age, upon her head. She had a little table before her, on which were many tracts and hymns in large type, suited to aged eyes; and a Bible lay open before her, also printed large.

But the stuffiness that told of a long day spent in one room with the windows closed made the air so heavy, that no wonder the poor old lady’s eyes looked dimmer than usual, and that she seemed oppressed and

wearied. She brightened up a little as Millie sat down beside her, and asked kindly after her health.

'Oh, mamma is very well just now, I am *so* thankful to say,' replied her daughter, who was making ineffective darts, or rather pecks, about the room, diving first into one cupboard, then into another, extracting half-finished pots of jam, remains of honeycomb, and plates of flabby water-biscuits to add to the luxury of her supper-table. 'Mamma is so well and happy, such a dear picture she makes, I tell her, with her sweet hymns, all the precious old favourites, at hand, and the blessed Book to sit and dream over. I gave her your little word to the children this afternoon to think over when I was out. So sweet and appropriate for her, now that she is growing a little child again.'

Millie could not but wonder how the old lady liked this tender treatment. She had been considered rather a strong-minded person in her day, one who was able to hold her own on questions of theology,—no babe to be fed on milk.

He turned over the hymns and found that, as Miss Kennedy had said, they were indeed the sweet old favourites of the most evangelical school, mixed with a few of the less intellectual efforts out of recent revival collections.

'I often weary sitting here all day,' said the mother heavily, when her daughter, in a little flutter of apology,

had gone to remove her bonnet and mantle. 'It is quite right, no doubt, for Anne to be so active as she is. I do not blame her; but, oh lad, it's hard to feel oneself a stupid useless log! She does her best, poor thing; she brings me all these,' passing her wrinkled hand over the little army of leaflets before her, 'but I don't seem to care much about the new ones; and at this day I am not needing to learn "There is a Fountain" or "Come, my soul, thy suit prepare." I am not altogether doited yet, although my eyesight is bad, and I have lost the use of my legs. But doubtless it is the Lord's will that my pride should be brought down in my old days, and I have much to be thankful for. And what word had you for the folk to-night?' she asked, a smile dawning on her sagacious old face, which must have been a fine one in its prime, and which even yet showed it had been built on nobler lines than her little self-righteous daughter's.

'Anne gave me your word to the bairns, but she is no hand at the heads. I could not make out from her how you treated it. She told me two or three stories, but you are not very lucky in your reporter, or I am more doited than I think myself,' with a little dry laugh. 'There was something about a bear and a holly-bush and the Wigtown martyrs and a Popish saint, but I fancy Anne had mixed them all through each other. They did not seem to have much to do with your text.'

Millie laughed. He was not angry, as he might have been had a younger person presumed to make fun of his anecdotes. How few of us like to be laughed at!

‘The bear had nothing to do with the fir-tree,—for it was a fir-tree not a holly-bush, Mrs. Kennedy,—and the Wigtown martyrs and St. Christopher did not come within ten minutes of each other. But it was rather weak stuff, I fear, not worth your exercising your brains upon.

‘I was reading a splendid book the other day that I am sure you would enjoy, a real contribution to theology. Should you care to have me read aloud to you for an hour or two sometimes?’ said the kind youth with a sudden inspiration. ‘I ought to get through some steady reading this winter, and your remarks would be of the greatest value to me often, I doubt not. Only, you must not be calling me a heretic, if I bring you the newest theories on Biblical criticism, you know.’

‘Oh, I am old and stupid enough,’ said Mrs. Kennedy, with the ready tears of age springing to her dim eyes, ‘but I was never hard on ministers. You need not be afraid of a heresy hunt. Thank you, lad. It would be a real pleasure to me to hear something with bone in it. I weary whiles of my spoon-meat.’

‘Then I’ll come,’ said Henry heartily, but inwardly

registering a resolve to have the windows opened on the earliest opportunity.

Not only the fumes of defunct breakfasts, dinners, and teas loaded the long-suffering air, but above and through all there was the dreary odour of dead theological works. The deceased Mr. Kennedy had himself been a minister, and his books stood in rows round and round the room, giving it a solemn air, which was feebly striven against by Miss Kennedy's dainty devices of texts in gold and silver lettering on crimson shields, futile ribbony calendars, and bunches of dried flowers from Nazareth or Jerusalem.

She came tripping into the room with a light step, and, laying an affectionate damp hand on her mother's brow, pronounced her ready for her bread and milk, and scolded her playfully for not having rung for it sooner.

'Indeed, Anne,' said the poor lady rather pettishly, 'I am not so very keen to see it now. I was just thinking, before you came in, that I should like a fresh egg for my supper, better than those never-ending sops you are so fond of giving me.'

'A fresh egg? certainly, dear mamma; ' and the kind daughter pulled at a limp embroidered bell-rope which hung at the side of the fire. After two or three of her ineffectual attempts, the bell sounded under the vigorous tug of Henry Millie, but the bell-pull came away in his hand.

'*Such* a pity, but I can *easily* mend it ; it is *such* a pretty bit of dear Lady Frances's work. She gave it to me after the last bazaar of the Anti-Tobacco Society's League, you know, when it was not sold,—*so* kind and thoughtful of her, was it not ?'

Alas, when the egg at last appeared poor Mrs. Kennedy could not eat it !

'No, my dear, I cannot say it is good ; and I will not file my stomach with it even to please you.'

'Dear mamma, I am so sorry, and I cannot understand it, for I always order our eggs from *such* a nice person, a dear interesting woman, an Irish widow, and a true Christian, who has only two hens, so that her eggs are sure to be *quite* fresh. Quite different from getting them from a shop, you know, where they get them in *large* quantities from no one knows where. I said to Mrs. M'Sweeny only last week, "Whenever you have a dozen of eggs, send them up to me, it is *such* a comfort to know one can be absolutely sure they are fresh."

'But old people are always fanciful, one knows, and one must learn to bear with their little whims and ways,'—this was added in a low voice to Millie, who found it difficult to make a suitable reply.

'Really, Anne, you are too clever for me,' said her mother, pushing away her plate ; 'but old as I am, I can still smell a bad egg when it's under my nose.'

Miss Anne smiled a patient smile, and went on making a hearty supper of bits and scraps of various sorts, all equally hard and indigestible, but each recommended by some peculiarly shining moral qualities in those who made, or sold, or bestowed them upon her. All her geese were swans.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW NEPHEW

PERHAPS it was no wonder that, as I have already hinted, Millie woke next morning in rather a dull and unhopeful mood.

Toasted cheese, when the cheese is old to begin with, and is washed down by over-boiled tea and followed by hard bread and honey, is a heavy supper to digest.

There was nothing to look forward to. He could not inflict himself again on Mrs. Frederick. He could not hope to have a week of eventful meetings such as the last had been. Perhaps *she* was offended with him. Perhaps she felt no interest in him at all. Why should Miss Kennedy be always before him, thrusting her round face and her wearisome chatter so often in his way, and Jane so seldom? Why, he could count on his fingers the times he had met her all this year! A more ridiculous place than Lochtown could not be imagined; where one might spend a life and meet one's

friends half-a-dozen times in the course of it. Plod on, doing one's duty to the end of the chapter, and find no one much the better for one's exertions. How glorious it would be to go far away with a bright companion at one's side, as was the lot of many a lucky fellow no better than oneself!

To leave behind Lochtown and all its absurd trivialities, and be a new man somewhere under happier skies! His blood began to flow quicker even at the thought, and unconsciously his spirits rose.

There *was* something yet to connect him with Miss Frederick. Had she not spoken of her wish to read over again Browning's *Dramatic Lyrics*? He had promised to lend her his copy. How could he have forgotten that? He hastened to the shelf where the volume stood, took it down, and dusted it carefully. It did smell abominably of smoke, but what can a fellow do?—Browning and a pipe were born for each other! He threw up the study window and laid the book in the draught, where the fresh morning air could blow upon it. He ruffled the pages carefully backwards and forwards, those pages that her eyes were to travel over; he even leaned out of the window and plucked a late rose which was nodding by the sill, and laid it between two of the open pages in hope that its delicate perfume might linger and scent the lines. He would go for a long walk that morning, a regular Monday stretch, and

the book should go with him and catch all the moorland fragrance, the rich breath of whins, and the wholesome pungency of bramble and bracken, and the blue smoke of peats. Then he would leave it at her door when he came back, and perhaps it would carry with it a message from the moors !

Meanwhile, as our young man's mind was filled with such harmless plotting, some one was drawing near to Lochtown who should prove a dangerous rival to his peace. For my part, I wish events had not tumbled over each other in such breathless haste ; but the narrator cannot choose the sequence in which they come.

Francis Maxwell Hay, after having despatched his letter to his aunt, with the contents of which we have been made acquainted, was approaching by leisurely marches, like an army through a friendly country, when suddenly his pace was quickened. The torrents of rain which had fallen in Lochtown had found him in a cathedral city in the Midlands, where he was endeavouring, to the best of his ability, to study and enjoy the architectural beauties of the place,—a sufficiently dismal task when one is alone, verging on middle age, and not naturally of an artistic temperament. The rain depressed the chilly Indian still more, and the weather prophecies of his fellows at the *table d'hôte* were not encouraging. 'The weather is broken for the season, not a doubt of it.'—'Going to Scotland—to Galloway, are you? The

wettest part of Britain, my dear sir. You'll be fortunate if you get there without stoppages from floods. Winter sets in regularly by the end of the month in those quarters. And when it doesn't rain it snows, you know.'

He listened patiently, twisting his moustache at the prophets of evil, and determining that he must hurry on, if only half of this were true.

So he spent Sunday in Carlisle, and at the very hour when Mrs. Frederick's nicely-worded little letter was being committed to the post, her nephew, to whom it was tardily addressed, was coming along through the fair borderland to make her acquaintance. On rushes the train over Solway Moss, with its memories of wild foray and disastrous rout, leaving hidden beauties all unsuspected on either hand. No time to pause and roam up Kirtleside, that lovely stream which wanders still through 'fair Kirkconnel lea,' and washes softly as of old past Helen's Grave, and takes its silent way through shade of solemn beeches, past the wooded brae where Blacket lifts its ruddy tower in air, and the hapless lover whom avenging Fleming slew, sleeps still within a bowshot of his ancient home. Ah! there are places unprofaned in Scotland yet, of which the tourist hardly knows. Yonder stands Repentance Tower, dark and square on Hoddam Hill, Ecclefechan nestling beneath it holding Carlyle's grave, and haunted Solway,

with its visions of Redgauntlet, stretches out its silver shield, clear shining on the left. So we go on to Dumfries, and farther on deep into the west till the evening shadows begin to lengthen, and Lochtown is reached at last. The traveller, his eyes still filled with the golden beauty of the moors, and the long arms of quiet lochs running up to meet the land, feels himself in a very prosaic place indeed. A rattling, jolting 'bus takes him through rows of two-storied brick cottage villas, over rough pavements, into the older parts of the town, where he is set down, with a final jar, at the door of a moderately good inn. Here is no picturesque ancient landlord overflowing with mediæval hospitality to meet one, any more than modern brightness and enterprise. All is commonplace. We do not even welcome profitable customers with much enthusiasm to Lochtown. We are too well satisfied with our own ways either to desire or provide novelties. We expect visitors to be equally well pleased.

Francis Hay, having been shown his bedroom (a plain room with a large four-post bed stripped of its curtains to make it so far conformable to modern fads, and with two windows equipped with muslin blinds tied in the centre with bright blue ribbons, and warranted to open only from the bottom) and seen his portmanteaux safely installed, was at a loss how to dispose of himself till his dinner hour should arrive.

On the whole, he thought he could not do better than proceed at once to look up his aunt, and make her acquaintance. 'I have come here on purpose to see her, so what is the use of delay?'

He made himself tidy after his journey (not that he was ever dishevelled, some men have the enviable faculty of looking always well dressed); then went downstairs, exciting a mild interest in the chambermaid, whom he met, and even in the loungers, who stared at him as he passed the bar, and so, in a leisurely manner, strolled down the street. He knew his aunt's house accurately by name, and one or two inquiries were sufficient to lead him to the spot. Places in Lochtown are not very difficult to find.

Jane, who was sitting at the window, teacup in hand, listening to her mother's leisurely reading of the local paper, heard the click of the gate and looked to see who the visitor might be.

A tall man in a light overcoat, rather sunburnt, with broad shoulders but of a slender figure, his close-cut light hair turning grey. Who could it be? Something familiar, surely, in the walk, in the well-cut features, in the turn of the head! Of course it could be no one else. 'Mother,' she almost stammered in the sudden excitement, 'it's himself, my cousin, Francis Hay!'

Mrs. Frederick turned pale and looked as if she were going to faint. Dr. Foster had said any strong agitation

must be guarded against as dangerous, and Jane had been glad to think Lochtown was not a place productive of much emotion; but the present was an unforeseen emergency.

But Mrs. Frederick had great self-control, and, by a strong effort of her will, she pulled herself together, and the delicate colour came back to her sweet face.

Fanny, though a good girl, was not very swift-footed, and Francis Hay had a full couple of minutes to wait before she gave him admission. When the door of the drawing-room at last opened and he came in, bending his high head a little as he came forward, his aunt was sitting in her arm-chair holding out a gentle hand.

Jane saw the loving look that swept over her mother's face, then came the sound of a kiss as the stranger stooped towards her, and her arm was about his neck. 'My boy,' she said, 'my dear boy!'

The estrangement and the absence of a lifetime were forgotten. This was no doubtfully welcome relative that stood before her. It was Reginald's son, almost Reginald himself, with her own mother's eyes looking out of his honest face.

There was no doubt from that moment that the cousin would be a success. As he sat there with his long legs stretched out to the fire, teacup in hand, the armorial bearings on which he had at once noted and

recognised, Jane saw her mother looking happier and brighter than she ever remembered her.

He had been told, and laughed over the idea, that he was a possible impostor; he had asked Jane's name and called her by it without a moment's hesitation; he had held his Aunt Mary's hand and answered every question she put to him; had given a report of Uncle Frank, whom he seemed to regard with liking mingled with a good deal of pity. 'Poor old chap, he is terribly kept under by her ladyship;' and after a pleasant hour spent in the firelight, for no one had thought of lighting the gas in the happy rush of meeting, he rose to go before his aunt had once remembered to feel shy of her grown-up nephew.

'Now I must be off,' he said, bending in the most natural manner to kiss Mrs. Frederick's brow, 'but I'll turn up in the morning, first thing after breakfast, and expect Jane to take me about and show me the place.'

'Where are you staying?' with a sudden sense of inhospitality.

'At the George; I'm better there, I think, than bothering you. But you'll see quite enough of me I don't doubt. You can't think how nice it is to find oneself among one's own people like this. You will have plenty of my society in the future to make up for lost time in the past.' He twirled his moustache as he

spoke, with a look at Jane which made her smile in his face.

‘What are you laughing at?’ he asked, as he stood hat in hand before her, with one foot on the fender in act to depart.

‘At you,’ she replied; ‘I could not think who you were like when you were making your compliments, then it flashed on me that I had seen the same face in the looking-glass. Mother, don’t you think it is true, though I am a Frederick and he is one of the “handsome Hays”?’

It was true. They had the same broad brows, the same grey-blue eyes; even the shape of their mouths was exceedingly alike, though, to be sure, his was hid at the corners by the moustache of which he seemed pardonably proud.

‘I never imagined there was some one like me ruling in the “gorgeous East,”’ she said, ‘over the toiling millions of Hindostan. I hope you were kind to your dependants.’

‘While you played the tyrant over my aunt,’ he said brightly; ‘which of us will prove the master spirit now we have met, I wonder? But there are some points of difference still; you are not grey like I am,’ passing his hand over his closely-cropped apology for curls.

‘Not yet,’ she said, ‘but give me time, give me time.’

'Mother, he's delicious,' said Jane, turning to give her parent a congratulatory hug, when the door had closed on her cousin, 'he's quite delightful, and you are his aunt.

'Uncle Frank, indeed! with his red face and his roundabout figure and thick voice, and his wife who gives herself airs,—and this dear creature; and to think he has been living all this time, and we hardly ever thought about him; and he has turned out like this!!! Are you proud of your nephew? There's the gate again; do you think he is coming back? Perhaps he forgot to leave cards for his haughty punctilious old aunt.'

'A book for me, Fanny? *The Works of Robert Browning*, vol. iii. It's all right, mother. Don't you remember, Mr. Millie said he'd lend it to me?'

If the brown book could have spoken it might have told a tale of a day spent up on the fresh brown moors; of lying now on a bush of late blossoming whins, a spike of prickly gold laid across its pages, while a cow came snuffing round, vaguely wondering what strange growth was this; anon, of a rapid passage through the air, as the owner went on his way from one lonely cot-house to another; till at last, when evening fell, it was laid in Jane Frederick's hands.

She was not in a mood for poetry when it was brought in; she put it down on a table and went on with her talk.

Her mother was so glad to have found a homely friend in the nephew whose coming she had rather dreaded. The arrival was well over, and now the pleasant part of the matter had begun.

After all, blood is thicker than water ; and in one's old age to have one's brother's son, bearing one's father's dear unforgotten name ; to have him appear a modest, friendly, handsome gentleman, is a blessing and a comfort not to be little esteemed.

'He seems a nice fellow,' she said to Jane. 'I am very thankful to see him look as he does, and full of kind thought and considerateness. I only hope he will be comfortable at the George. I wonder if we ought to ask him to stay here instead ; but a gentleman is a little formidable in a small house like ours, and Fanny is by no means a perfect cook. Still, if you thought it right——'

'Oh, that can settle itself by and by,' said Jane, who had no leisure for domestic discussions just then. 'He will do very well at the George in the meantime, until we have had time to consider the wonderful fact of his existence. My head is still quite dizzy with knowing that I have a cousin like that who calls me "Jane."'

Her mother looked fondly at the girl as she stood on the hearthrug. She had never seen Jane so animated, so bright and excited. Her eyes were brilliant, her cheeks had a rosy flush, she had lost the wistful look

which of late had been rarely absent from her face. She stood tall and erect, a pleasant picture for any one's eyes to behold.

A whole train of thoughts came into her mother's head. If it could only be that this new nephew should prove a heaven-sent gift; if he might take a fancy to Jane—and surely it would not be difficult to do so—and if her girl, her good girl, could love him in return, then indeed she might sing her *Nunc Dimittis*, and so depart in peace.

But then things are so often too good to be true.

In came Fanny to remove the tea-tray, and the gas must be lit, and the first enthusiasm of the new arrival was over.

'We certainly fell into his arms, mother, at least you did,' said Jane, coming back to sober thoughts; 'and he is more than all my fancy painted (for I imagined him short and stubby-looking)—and perhaps he has a wife.'

'I don't think so,' said her mother, innocently and openly distressed; 'oh, I am sure I hope not! He is much better as he is, and I am certain he would have mentioned her. You ought not to put such uncomfortable ideas into one's head, dear. A wife, I hope and trust not.'

'Look always on the dark side, that is the safest plan in this world,' replied Jane, taking up the book that Millie had sent her, and opening it at haphazard.

I am named and known by that moment's feat ;
There took my station and degree ;
So grew my own small life complete,
As nature obtained her best of me—
One born to love you, sweet !

A single gold blossom of whin was resting between the leaves, so the book had to open there. She let the bloom lie idly in her open palm for a moment, then blew, and it fluttered down into the heart of the fire, while she read mechanically to the end of the beautiful poem.

'One born to love you, sweet !' The tender words echoed over and over in her mind through the evening. Ought a man to say so much for any woman born ? 'To love you, sweet ! one born to love you, sweet !' Would the right man ever be likely to say so, would he be the right man if he could ?

Jane was not sure that she believed in such fair-spoken men. Yet a man had written the poem, and perhaps he knew the possibilities of his sex.

'Oh, mother, isn't he soothing ?' she said, irrelevantly, as she sat with the kitten in her lap, stroking its head while it purred in an ambitiously grown-up manner.

'Pussy ? No, I think she is rather noisy to-night. What will her purring be like when she is a cat, if she is so vehement already in her youth ?'

'I did not mean pussy, who is a lady ; I meant my cousin, who is a gentleman. He seems to be so very

unobtrusive, and at the same time such a swell, and his voice, unlike pussy's, is soft and low. I have often told you that I am a snob, and I am more sure of it now than ever. I am looking forward to showing myself all over Lochtown to-morrow with my beautiful cousin in his beautiful coat. Did you notice the cut of his coat? I should like to meet all the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood (what a pity it won't be market day!), to see their faces of surprise and admiration when their eyes light on him.

'I wonder what he thinks of us, mother? He likes you, I daresay, because you are his aunt and an angel, but I don't know that I am striking in any remarkable degree. "Not a bad girl." Perhaps he may go that length in my praise. He does not know what a luxury it is to find oneself in company with some one from the outer world. Do you imagine the Shorter Catechism would call him my superior? Either that or my equal, and in Lochtown there are so few. "Superiors, inferiors, or equals." And there are such lots of inferiors. Where shall I take him? What shall we do to amuse him? How long will he stay in Lochtown?

'For quiet people we are having almost too much excitement to be good form. It is a great comfort that his voice is soft, isn't it, pussy?'

CHAPTER XV

BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER

THE forenoon had hardly begun when the tall figure, this time without the light overcoat, came up the garden path. Jane thought he looked, if possible, more delightful than on the previous evening in his admirably fitting tweed suit. (Some men's clothes have the knack of looking smart and never aggressively new.) He came softly into the dining-room where, Fanny told him, his aunt was writing, and at once took the right arm-chair, and looked as if he had been used to it all his days. When Jane came in she found him occupied in adjusting a new cord to the single eyeglass, without which, as he explained, he felt quite helpless. He had purchased it on his way through the town, and Jane watched, amused, the sensible way in which he knotted the cord to the proper length. Her mother's scissors lay beside him on the table; he was assuming his place as son of the house. She did not know much of the ways of men, and had no idea they were so handy.

His glass again securely fixed in his eye, he looked round the room critically, asking the names of the various people whose likenesses hung on the walls. It was so strange to see him walking about, this utterly new figure, in the quiet life, stranger to Jane than to her mother, who saw in him his father revived.

'How old are you, Frank?' Mrs. Frederick asked as he stood examining a miniature of his grandfather which was on the mantelpiece. 'I am ashamed to say I forget how old you were when your father was killed.'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'It is well you asked me that question to-day. I am thirty-nine, but to-morrow is my birthday. Frightful, isn't it? Harry was a year younger, poor chap, but he died long ago.

'Do you think I look my age?' and he turned quickly round. 'I fancy I do; India ages one fast, and at least I am as grey as a badger.

'How old are you, Jane? Let me guess—two-and-twenty?

'Six-and-twenty?—you don't say so. Well, that's young enough after all, but I must say you keep your youthful looks in Lochtown. Aunt Mary will be giving herself out as an old lady next, and I'm sure she does not look a day over fifty.'

'But she is sixty-eight, my dear boy,' she said, smiling tenderly at him, 'and old even for her years, as you will find out when you know her a little better. I fear you

are a bit of a flatterer ; yet I do think there is something in the quiet life we lead that keeps us from looking very old. Jane has no late hours to steal away her bloom, nor exciting events to draw lines on her cheeks.'

'In fact, her face is quite uninteresting, more like a turnip than anything else,' said Jane. 'Mother means to be complimentary, but she does not always succeed.'

Frank smiled indulgently. 'I don't allow any one to speak pertly of my aunt,' he said, taking her thin old hand in his. 'And now, Miss Frederick, would it not be a good plan for you to put on your hat and show me the lions? They told me in England that a bright day in Galloway was a rarity not to be wasted indoors. And I can't suppose you mean to let me wander alone, losing my way in the land of my fathers.'

'You will come back to lunch?' asked Mrs. Frederick when the pair stood ready to start.

'If you won't tire of seeing me,' said the nephew in the soft kind voice which Jane already loved him for using to her mother. He seemed to have adopted her with thorough affection. Jane felt herself a secondary adjunct to 'My aunt.'

They were a handsome pair as they walked together down the street, Jane with her swift feet having to pause more than once to keep in line with the leisurely Indian.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'I must not be so lazy ; but, after all, Jane, where are we rushing to?'

'I don't know,' she replied, with a blush and a smile. 'It is a bad habit of mine to hasten along; I am so accustomed to walk alone, and there is nothing to make one loiter. The shops in Lochtown are not extraordinarily seductive.'

They were pacing along the High Street when they came suddenly upon Henry Millie, rushing, like Jane, round a corner.

'Excuse me a moment,' she said, while she stopped to thank him for the book he had sent her. Her cousin dutifully contemplated melons and tea-chests in the adjoining grocer's windows as long as politeness required, but turned round in time to ask for an introduction which Jane performed in a voice which faltered a little. The two men shook hands, and Hay thought he saw that the minister, as well as Jane, was somewhat excited by this chance meeting.

'My cousin is staying at the George,' she said; 'this is his first visit to Lochtown, and I am to show him its beauties. Where do you think I should take him first?'

'Miss Frederick insists on this being a dull place,' said Hay, with a little bow to his cousin, 'but, on my word, I think it's charming. One couldn't wish for anything prettier than this quaint street now when the sun is shining as it does to-day, and then the air is so fresh.'

'You've not had long experience of Lochtown; wait

till the glamour has had time to wear off,' said Jane, secretly pleased with the praise of her birthplace. 'But there *are* pretty places to show you of course, only I don't know where to begin.'

'I should recommend "the Hill" for a start,' said Millie, looking into her face more wistfully than I suppose he knew, 'and for to-morrow, why there's Castle Hamilton. People are always charmed with the old place.'

'Or the Rocky Bay,' said Jane, 'the Rocky Bay is my favourite spot of all.'

'Yes,' he answered, but his face fell. He could not be pleased that she should take this smiling, self-satisfied stranger to the place he had begun to think sacred. Who was this Francis Hay? How long did he propose to stay? His appearance on the scene was quite superfluous.

'Are you making a long stay in Lochtown?' he questioned, hoping to hear that he was a mere bird of passage.

'I hope so,' Hay answered pleasantly. 'Am I, Jane? As long as my aunt does not tire of me, I should say; but my plans are unsettled at present. This is my native country I consider, you know, although I was born in India, and I want to make thorough acquaintance with it. But one's plans don't depend only on one's own wishes unfortunately, still I hope to see a good

deal. Shall we try "the Hill," Jane, as Mr. Millie advises?'

'If you like,' she said; 'we go this way then, so good-bye and thank you so much for the book, Mr. Millie.'

'That was a good-looking chap,' said Hay cheerfully as they toiled up the hill. 'A parson of some sort, I saw. You must take me to hear him hold forth on Sunday, Jane. Is he your parish minister?'

'Oh no,' said his cousin, 'my parish minister would scorn the imputation. He is a most dignified person, and we are all Dissenters in his eyes, and Mr. Millie is quite beyond the pale. But there is no use trying to explain our Scotch differences to you, is there—Frank?' She hesitated half a second over the name, then went on with a rush—

'You Anglo-Indians are above trying to understand our distinctions, are you not? You divide people roughly into black and white, and that exertion is quite enough for you.'

'Some wise person told you that,' he said. 'There are a lot of such smart sayings abroad. But I rather fancy myself at minor differences in race, and so forth, and some wet day you'll have to lecture to me on the shades of Presbyterianism in Scotland. You *are* a Presbyterian, aren't you? I am sure that was one of Uncle Frank's grounds of complaint against my aunt.

He thought less of me than before when he found I took the fact calmly.'

'Uncle Frank!' said his undutiful niece with a contemptuous toss of her head. 'Who cares what he thinks?'

'Not I, I can assure you,' said his namesake, 'except that I rather like the old chap. But my aunt is about as good a guide in religious matters as he is, I'll joyfully allow.

'I hope I know a Christian when I see one. You don't have a face like your mother's without something behind it. She has the peaceful look one comes to recognise.'

'Yes,' said Jane, whose idea of her cousin's character was being rapidly modified. Perhaps it was she who should turn out to be flippant and mundane, suiting her conversation to a superficiality which did not exist.

'You know I was bred in the Church, the Church of England, and of course I think no end of her service and all; but I'd better explain at once where I stand. You see it was like this. About five years ago an old preaching peer came along, (I daresay you may have heard of him), Lord Mount Plunkett, an Irish lord, and not an awfully wise one at that. You've never seen him? Well, he's about the best man I ever met, and has done the best for me; not that my mother had not taught me well; it was not her fault that I needed to be

changed, or converted, or whatever one likes to call it. He came and preached in the place where I was "the simple gospel" as he calls it, and the old story seemed new or I had new ears. Anyhow I took it in freshly, and since then I can't see that minor differences matter so long as we have learned Christ. I know lots of the best Christians think differently, and that it's a matter of conscience to keep to different camps. Perhaps it's because I am so late in beginning that I feel I have no time to lose in learning all the points of difference. You see I never studied theology. And anyhow I am not the kind of man that ought to set up as an exclusive, and think myself better than my neighbours.'

'It is delightful to hear you,' said Jane, shy of speaking her deeper thoughts. 'I am such a bigot myself that I revel in your breadth of mind.'

'Now you are laughing at me,' he said. 'But I am in a good humour this morning, and you won't find me easy to snub.'

'Do you think I snub people?' she asked. 'I don't think I mean to unless they are what my mother calls very "presuming."'

'You were kind to that chap Millie,' he said; 'but then, to be sure, he seemed meekness and mildness personified, and now you are to be kind to me and tell me the names of every hill and glen as you promised.'

For by this time they had reached the top of the ridge above the town, and were standing, well content, side by side, 'looking frae them' over a broad expanse of field and flood.

'It was high time I came home,' he said presently. 'Do you know I would spout Sir Walter on the least encouragement.

'Land of my sires, what mortal hand
Can ere untie the filial band
That knits me to thy rugged strand?

Where does Craig Hay lie? Can we see it, Jane?'

'It lies over there,' she said, pointing northward. 'Over there among those brown hills. Perhaps we could go some day and look over the house. I don't think the new people are often at home.'

'I should like nothing better,' he replied. 'And what is that point right above us? Couldn't we go there now?'

'It's too far for this morning,' she said. 'It's the "hill of the five kingdoms," where you see five kingdoms at once, you know.'

'Five! how much? Oh, I see. England, Scotland, and Ireland—but that's only three. You'll need to help me out with the others.'

'The Kingdom of Man, the Isle of Man, you remember,' she said, 'in *Peveril of the Peak*' (not knowing how far his knowledge of his Waverley might go), 'and

then "the Kingdom of Heaven," pointing up to the sky, with a misgiving lest he should think her profane.

'That's rather good,' he said, 'who said it first, I wonder? You?'

'No, no,' she disclaimed the impeachment, 'it's a threadbare Galloway tale, a regular Joe Miller of the most ancient sort.'

'Well! it's new to me, and why should my cousin not be the author? I daresay you would have been if you had been born soon enough.'

So they strolled home happily together, Jane learning to slacken her speed as she listened to her cousin's pleasant voice. He talked a good deal, and it was a complete change to the lively girl who was so accustomed to be the queen of her small society, that she should have a companion who could amuse her more than her own thoughts. It was pleasant to look at everything through the stranger's eyes, and he had a way of seeing the best side of whatever she showed him. A few hours are enough sometimes to put a new face upon the world. What a different place even Lochtown might be with such a friend by one's side? Jane felt that she had never enjoyed a walk so much, and was not altogether pleased at the feeling. How stunted her life must have been if a stranger's mere looks and words could make it put forth buds and blossoms of happiness so fast.

Our hearts in glad surprise,
To higher levels rise.

‘Blood is thicker than water,’ the well-worn proverb was again put to use, but after all, Archie and John MacLure were of her own blood as much as he, and she did not remember to have felt particular thrills of pleasure in their society.

She seemed to have told him everything, she reflected, as she sat dreaming in her chair that night, when he had at last gone off to his inn. What was there about him so sympathetic that drew out all her most secret thoughts? How easily the day had slipped by! They had tea in the garden in the sunny corner where her mother was sheltered from the wind, and Frank had handed the cups so cleverly, and eaten toast and scones with such a grace. How his pipe even became him, and the tilt of his hat when the sun was in his eyes, which on John MacLure would have looked vulgar, was admirable on Francis Hay.

‘He likes me too, I am sure he does, he smiles so kindly. And when he returned after dinner, and we went down to see the steamer start, and the pier looked its best in the darkness with the flashing lights reflected in the water, and the moon above so yellow and round, and we looked through the black bars down into the black waves below, how different it was from any other night! “Oh, the little more and how much it is, and

the little less and what worlds away." He is not making poetical remarks, he is only being there and that is enough. But how long will he stay, and what shall I do when he's gone ?

'And yet, I could not endure to have him quoting Browning. One is enough to do that. He is so much better as he is ; I never knew before what a charming thing a pipe could be.

'I am having my holiday now. This is a holiday, and I ought to be glad and thankful, and make the most of it while it lasts and not lose my head, and think I can never be happy when lessons begin again.

'And he does like me a little, though I am not brilliant or beautiful ; it is strange how good-natured he makes me feel, and not as if I had to toil to invent conversation.

'What is it that Matthew Arnold says?—

' Shall know ourselves and learn at last
Our true affinities of soul.

'But that's when life's past I believe, "Our true affinities of soul."

' So far apart our lives are thrown
From the twin soul that shares our own.

'Oh, what rubbish I am thinking, and yet it is true. And all because his moustache has the exact twist I like, and his brow is the right breadth, and his coat fits him

so beautifully—and he is my cousin, Francis Maxwell Hay.’

She repeated the name to herself. It was such a fascinating name. There is no use struggling against fate. “‘You have your dreams, my dear, and your liberty, and your love.” That was what Mrs. MacDowall told me, and if I choose to do as I like with them, I suppose I may. If he had not come it is quite possible I might have liked the other, who is far cleverer than Frank ; but now, how unnatural it looks, a thing not to be thought of for a moment.

‘And I hope he’ll never take it into his head, or forget it if he has taken it already.

‘It would have been a patched-up thing, born of vanity, and the dulness of Lochtown, and desire for novelty and pleasure.

‘But this is an inspiration, a blessing, a breath of romance, a tenderness, a reality ; anything but a machine set going with difficulty. Oh, I am happy ! I am happy ! however it ends. “One born to love you, sweet.”’

CHAPTER XVI

HIS LOVING LILLA

IN this exalted frame of mind our heroine went to bed, and awoke in the morning after a sound sleep, of the same opinion still. She was in that early and happy stage of infatuation, through which, as she ruefully suspected, Henry Millie was passing with regard to herself, only, as she had grounds for asserting, without half the right or the cause.

Was not Frank her cousin, her own relation? Had not she already spent hours in his dear society? Above all, was he not *much* more attractive than a home-bred girl like her could be to any man of sense? There was no reason, no reason whatever, that the 'Covenanter' should take a fancy to her, no reason at all that she should be expected to return it. She took up his book, as in duty bound, after breakfast, to read some of it, and to beguile the time until——well! until Frank should appear. The sides of the pages were marked, and she looked with curiosity for the owner's favourite passages.

He seemed to have a keen eye for beauties, but she did not like the habit of pencilling books ; however, she must allow that her own dearest bits seemed his. One or two of the marks were suspiciously fresh. 'We two stood there with never a third.'

Her cheek flushed as she laid down the volume. Was not that the click of the garden gate? Yes, the butcher's boy. 'We two stood there with never a third.' And to her that would mean always now the end of the grimy unromantic steamer pier of Lochtown, with the black water lapping softly round the piles ! It provoked her to think of Millie with his plangent voice, and that dark face of his. Poets should not be allowed to publish love-poems that anybody could appropriate. They ought to keep their love affairs to themselves, not sell them at so much a volume.

She could not endure the idea of any one thinking of her as one of a possible 'We two.' She had had from childhood a curious dislike to being talked about. 'To hear Anne Kennedy say "Jane Frederick," is enough to make me hate my poor little name.'

'Frank is later to-day,' said her mother, coming into the room where Jane sat. 'It is odd how natural it seems to be expecting him, there is certainly a very homely way about that boy.'

'Yes,' said Jane. She did not even think it necessary to laugh at her mother for calling Frank a boy.

'Ah! there he comes,' as, with a sigh of relief, she recognised how tiresome the waiting time had been. Browning is sometimes put at a disadvantage, by the circumstances in which he is read.

'Did you think I had overslept myself?' said Frank, coming in with his soft step and voice. 'The fact was I got some letters forwarded to me from my Club, and I thought it better to answer them at once, and get them off my mind before I came to be congratulated.'

'Oh, your birthday,' said Jane, who had been thinking of the interesting anniversary all morning, and, with a reluctance unlike her, had not spoken of it to her mother.

'Yes, my birthday,' said her cousin. 'I hardly hoped you'd remember. Have you thought of some special treat for me, Jane? I shall not be satisfied without some celebration. By the way, if you don't mind, I know the very thing, a ready-made excursion in honour of the day. I read about it every time I come here. Sail up the —shire coast by the steamer *Princess Royal*. I never went a "Trip" in my life, but I think I can promise not to be sea-sick, if you would care to go —that is.'

'September 25th,' said the girl. 'How often I read those bills last week, but I did not know it would be your birthday party. Of course we shall go.'

'And my aunt will have a birthday cake ready for

tea when we come back from our voyage. When do you have your birthday, Jane? You look rather doubtful over mine. Do you think the "impostor" has invented one for the occasion?'

'I shall let you know in good time,' she replied, 'I have them as seldom as possible, since I am growing so old. But forty is the prime of youth in a male. No wonder mother calls you a "boy."'

'That's all you know about it,' shrugging his shoulders. 'Why, I have letters here,—“But that's another story,” as Rudyard Kipling says; and I am out on a spree to-day. Won't you come into the garden and feed the pigeons? That's what I'd like best, and the birthday king always gets his way. Oh, never mind a hat, you've plenty of hair, you don't need to fear catching cold, and I am to hold the basket and give them as much Indian corn as I please. Aunt Mary will give us *carte blanche*.'

'I wish to show you something,' said Frank presently, laying down the empty basket on the grass below the apple tree, and beginning to search in his breast pocket.

He thought his cousin looked very nice as she stood spreading out empty hands, long well-shaped hands they were, to the pigeons who would not take 'No' for an answer, but persisted in perching on her shoulder, and blundering about her head, with their soft feathers against her face and hair. Perhaps she was thinking

the same of him, but about herself I must do her the justice to say, she was not ever much concerned.

He took out a letter-case and began to turn over its contents. One letter fell through his fingers, and lay on the grass face upwards.

Jane could not help seeing the words—

‘Dear, dearest Frank,
Your loving Lilla.’

He stooped in his leisurely way and picked it up, saying, as he replaced it, ‘That’s not it.’ ‘Ah! here it is,’ and he laid a photograph in Jane’s hand. The photograph of a handsome elderly lady, well bred, well dressed, and thoroughly unexceptionable.

‘So English,’ was the commentary that Jane might have made. But she only looked at it in silence.

‘My mother,’ he said. ‘It is eight years since she died, and I did not care to come home when she was not there. Has not she a fine face? She was considered a great beauty, you know, at the time of her marriage.’ He seemed waiting for Jane’s sympathy.

‘It is very nice. I should think a good likeness too,’ in a voice that she knew sounded horrid, so cold and stiff.

‘I must show it to my aunt,’ he went on, giving a tender touch to remove any possible dust speck on the picture, ‘but it isn’t half good enough, it does not do her justice.’

Jane took the photograph again from his hand and

gazed at it earnestly. It was a kind handsome old face. But who was his loving Lilla? 'Let me look a little longer?' she managed to say it, with a proper appearance of interest. Her cousin was not keen-eyed to see deficiencies in his friend, and his heart was full of the memory of his lost mother.

He looked over her shoulder in silence, then gently taking the picture put it back in his case.

'Ah, you greedy birds,' he said, briskly clapping his hands to dismiss them. 'You have had more than enough, I can assure you. Shoo fly!'

One claw of a pigeon more daring than the rest, had got entangled in Jane's hair. How clever Frank's fingers were, to be sure, as he bade her stand steady while he set her free. Ah, why had she read those words? They had raised a wall between them. She could not ask him what they meant.

'Dear, dearest Frank.' Who had a right to address him so boldly?

She could hardly endure his touch while such a secret lay between her and him. How could he look so honest and kind? Yet why should he not? Is it a sin for a man to have a sweetheart, a wife, and not tell his cousin of her existence on the second day, or the third of their acquaintance? Jane convinced herself of her own unreasonableness, with an effort, just as the last hair was untwined from the pigeon's red foot.

'What a pity,' said Frank, looking at the gold threads he held in his hand. 'But you can afford them, it would be a different matter if some of my scanty locks were to be torn out.' He went on winding the threads round his finger till they shone a glittering ring. Jane had moved off, and was gathering such flowers as she could find. He followed her about the paths, his never long idle pipe alight, till she said she could get no more asters, and that the time of chrysanthemums was hardly yet.

'Mayn't I have a buttonhole on my birthday?' he asked. 'See, Jane, if I can reach that spray of jasmine you will not grudge it. Not a ghost of a present have you proposed to give me yet.' He stretched up his hand with a laughing look into her eyes for permission. 'You are not kind to me,' he said. 'Am I boring you, Jane? Perhaps you are busy, and I am keeping you dawdling here. You see when a fellow is at home on furlough, he is apt to expect that everybody else is at leisure. You must send me off when I get insufferable.'

'No, no,' said Jane with the desperate earnestness that she felt so misplaced. 'I suppose I am cross. Here, let me put it in.' And she took the spray of starry blossom and stuck it in his coat. How sweet and delicate was the perfume.

'Ah, now I have vexed you,' said her cousin peni-

tently. 'I was only joking, dear, you are far too kind to me—far kinder than I deserve.'

'In fact we are both perfect,' said Jane, breaking into a harsh little laugh. But her heart was sore. Something seemed to have gone through it, like a stab from a poisoned knife.

'You'll tell me to go when I am in the way, though,' he said. 'Promise now, or I'll have to leave by to-night's train, to show my proper pride and independence of spirit, and that wouldn't suit me at all. I have hardly begun to enjoy the delights of Lochtown.

'And of your relatives' society.'

'And of your society, as you so well remark. Then that's arranged, you give me a broad hint to go and I'll take it if it's broad enough, and I feel so inclined.'

'Very well,' said Jane, and she could not refuse the hand with which he wished to conclude the bargain. He held her's a little longer than was needful before he let it go. Oh! why was he any one's 'Dear, dearest Frank'?

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRINCESS ROYAL

‘Who is that lady who is looking at us through a pince-nez, a long, tortoise-shell handled pince-nez?’ asked Frank as he and Jane walked down the harbour to where, gaily bedizened with flags, and bright as white and gold paint could make her, the *Princess Royal* lay disembarking her passengers. ‘See, a very stout party with a lot of roses in her bonnet. She is pointing us out to her companions. We are evidently of surpassing interest.’

They were in the midst of an elbowing crowd of trippers, whose attentions were too pressing to leave Jane at leisure to look. Frank put his arm lightly round her to protect her from pushes, and pointed with his finger to an imposing figure on deck.

Jane felt herself grow red with pleasure at his touch, or with annoyance, as she recognised her Aunt MacLure.

‘I am a horrid snob,’ she told herself, ‘to be ashamed of my own aunt, but she will talk so terribly

and ask such questions. And John ! and Emily and Lizzie ! Oh dear, this is rather dreadful !'

'It is my aunt,' she said, as a whole broadside of smiles and hand-waving was directed upon the pair, who were now slowly making their way with a crowd of Loch-towners towards the gangway.

'Eh ! what ?' said Frank, screwing his glass into his eye, from which it had been dislodged in the temporary crush. 'My aunt ?—I did not know there was another. She's not very like the rest of us, is she ?'

He seemed rather bewildered, and Jane laughed as she made haste to reassure him.

'My Aunt MacLure. My father's sister,' she said softly, while she heard herself hailed in various voices, Glasgow in accent and friendliness.

'Well, Jane, you did not expect to see us, I daresay. Such a lovely day, we thought the sea-air would be good for us. Emily and I were coming anyway to spend a week with Archie, and Lizzie plagued John till he came with her just for the sail.' They were all speaking at once, the good lady and her two daughters, while John stood taking off his cap to his cousin as he leaned over the bulwarks, in a tweed ulster of aggressively large checks, a suit of clothes to match, and a necktie of MacLure tartan.

The whole party had pleasant honest faces, and smiled as they gazed with undisguised curiosity on the stranger, whom 'Jane Frederick had picked up.'

'How is mamma?' was the next remark, fired off in a loud voice, as if through a speaking-trumpet, into Jane's face, as she and Frank were propelled over the gangway on to the space and freedom of the deck.

'Ma speaks as loud as if a gale were blowing,' said her daughter Emily, kissing Jane effusively on both cheeks, and casting friendly glances over her shoulder at the good-looking stranger.

'Mother is very well,' said Jane, trying to seem glad at the meeting. 'May I introduce my cousin, aunt, Mr. Francis Hay,—Mrs. MacLure, the Miss MacLures. Ah, John, how are you? Mr. John MacLure, Frank.'

'I am very glad to see you, I am sure,' said Aunt MacLure, drawing herself up, and bowing in an imposing manner, while her handsome gold bracelets rattled at her wrists.

Hay shook hands with all the party in turn, (Jane thought he looked extraordinarily nice as he did so), and began to pay suitable attentions to Mrs. MacLure.

'Jane calls you her cousin,' the matron said affably, when she was comfortably resettled on the bench whence she had hurried, at the reported sight of, 'Jane Frederick with a masher.' 'But, indeed, you know that does not make me much the wiser. Cousin is a rather uncertain word in a young lady's mouth. It may mean one thing or another.'

Frank, much amused at the lady's waggishness, hastened to explain himself.

'I can assure you I am her cousin. You must not treat me as an impostor, please. My aunt, Mrs. Frederick, acknowledges me. My name is Hay, Frank Hay, son of Reginald Hay who was killed at Lucknow; there's really no deception about me.'

'Oh, I did not mean that,' said Aunt MacLure. 'It's only that I never heard of Jane having any cousins but my own young people, but I'm sure we are all very glad to make your acquaintance, in this easy friendly way. My girls are just devoted to the military, as I often tell them, and you officers are apt to be spoilt amongst them, as I daresay you know by this time. Lizzie here thinks no end of the soldiers, and I have do doubt Jane is just the same when she gets the chance. What do you say to that, Jane?'

'Where has she gone? Oh! off with John, to be sure. There they are at the other end of the boat already.'

'I must not give her a bad character behind her back, then, but she was always fond of the lads—the fuss she used to make with my son Archie—him that is married now, and has the big farm. But you'll not have seen Archie yet, Captain Hay, or is it Major Hay, for I know you military gentlemen don't like to be called out of your titles?'

'But I'm not a military gentleman,' said Hay smiling. 'I am afraid I haven't any titles to be made free with.'

I'm only a civil servant, and thankful for any spoiling you have to spare.'

'Mamma is too bad,' said Miss Lizzie, who was quite prepared to think well of 'Jane's mash,' soldier or not. 'She thinks every girl she sees is "looking out for a lad," as she calls it. It gives one some idea of what *she* did in her youth, does it not? Fancy accusing Jane of running after Archie and John, when the truth is she thinks us not nearly good enough for her.'

'Nonsense, Lizzie, what an idea!' said Mrs. MacLure vexedly, for her motherly mind had already annexed this 'good-looking fellow' as a possible husband for one of her daughters. 'I am sure we have always been on the most pleasant terms with your Aunt Frederick, and Mr. Hay knows I am only joking about Jane. It is delightful to have all met like this, and such a pleasant day for a sail. If the band give us a tune as they did when we were sailing down the coast, I daresay you'll all be ready for a dance by and by.'

'Is that a necessary part of the programme?' said Frank, looking somewhat ruefully at his boots. 'I don't think I am equipped for waltzing. You must know this is my birthday, Miss MacLure, and I must not be made to do anything I don't like. But Jane is in charge, I am personally conducted by Jane. Shall we go and ask her opinion?' and accompanied by Miss Lizzie he set off in search of his keeper.

How blue Jane's eyes were as she stood, in her blue serge suit and little white-ribboned sailor hat, looking out to sea! John MacLure was talking to her, and Emily was glad to see Lizzie and the stranger coming towards them. Emily had recently had an *affaire du cœur* 'with one of the military gentlemen,' of whom her mother spoke, which had not as yet come to a comfortable ending, and she was feeling down-hearted accordingly. But her face brightened when she saw Frank Hay's agreeable smile, and she moved a step forward to meet him and her sister.

'When are we to start?' he enquired. And it was while he spoke that he was struck with the bright blueness of his cousin's eyes. 'Don't you think it time we were under weigh?' Jane had turned round when she heard his voice.

'What do you think, Jane?' he went on. 'Your aunt says there is a band on board, and that by and by we shall be asked to dance. But I told her you are my keeper, and that I am not to do anything without your approval.'

'A perfect nuisance that band is too,' said John MacLure in a rich Glasgow accent. 'It's a disgrace that honest quiet people can't go down the water, on a fine day like this, without being deaved by a set of German scoundrels blowing cracked trumpets. We are not allowed to look at the sea, and the coast, in peace with-

out that weary brass music screeching at us. And as for dancing,—my mother's daft about dancing. She'll be wishing you girls to go and dance on Glasgow Green next. I am sure we have plenty of it in our own house to serve any one.'

'That is because John would never go to the dancing-school, Mr. Hay,' his sister eagerly explained.

'But I must say I agree with him for once,' said Emily. 'I don't think the deck of the *Princess Royal* is quite the place one would choose for a waltz.'

'But the band is not half bad,' interposed Lizzie. 'John cares for nothing but Moody and Sankey, and thinks any more elaborate music is wicked; he'd be in his element now, if an American organ was discoursing sacred songs and solos to him.'

'Well, he might have worse tastes,' said Frank, smiling.

'That's what I often tell you,' said John, who was a good-natured fellow, giving Emily, who stood nearest him, a friendly shake. 'You may be thankful that I am so easily pleased. They laugh at me, don't you know,' turning to Hay as he spoke, 'because I'm a teetotaller, and fond of evangelistic meetings and those sorts of things; but I tell them there's a lot more sense and comfort to be got out of them, than out of all the Classical Concerts they crack up, or the Music Halls that half the fellows I know are daft about.'

'Ah! there we are off,' as the screw began to revolve and the long low pleasure-steamer slowly forged its way down the loch. 'Now this is what I like,—a fresh air, blue sky, and good company, and a pipe—that is if you don't object, Jane,' and he drew an embroidered pouch from his pocket, and began to stuff tobacco into his meerschau.

Frank looked on amused and half-annoyed. To be sure, this rather second-rate but evidently worthy youth had the right to call her 'Jane,' to lean over the ship's side with her, and to make a friendly clutch at the little hat, which a sudden gust of wind had almost blown off.

He was her cousin also, curiously enough. Ah, no! he had not the right though to puff his smoke in her face, and make her cough, while he enquired from her the names of the places on the shores of the loch. That at least must be put a stop to at once. Besides, this was *his* birthday party, not John MacLure's, and on the whole he proposed to spend it in Miss Frederick's company himself.

'You're rather in the wind there, I think; come and sit at this side, you will find it more sheltered.' And Jane found herself obeying gladly enough. Frank had carried a plaid with him over his arm, a piece of forethought she had considered unnecessary, but had not liked to say so, remembering that Anglo-Indians are traditionally chilly. Now it appeared the plaid was for

her, and he proceeded to fasten it round her shoulders with the pearl pin which he took from his necktie. 'Take care,' she remonstrated, as he fearlessly thrust it through the thick woollen folds, 'you'll break it.'

'Shall I?' he asked. 'I think not, and if I do are there no jewellers in Lochtown? Now you are ship-shape,' as he buttoned his own overcoat up to his throat and turned the collar up to his ears.

The Miss MacLures looked on admiringly as they also fastened their ulsters. Really, Jane Frederick looked almost pretty, with that old plaid of her mother's hanging from her shoulders. Where had this Mr. Hay come from? He seemed a nice sort of fellow, who gave himself no airs though he looked such a swell.

'Now we are comfortable,' he said, sitting down by Jane on the end of a bench. 'By the way, though, your mother is alone, Miss MacLure. Just keep this seat for me, Jane, while I go and see if she is all right.'

'What a kind fellow he is,' said the daughters, looking tenderly after him. 'I must say, Jane, you are fortunate. But where did you pick him up? What is he doing here? Has he a wife? Be quick and tell us all about him before he comes back; it's awfully good of him to go and bother after mamma. John ought to do that.'

Jane gave the few particulars that were to be told about the stranger. She was warm and glowing in the

cosy shelter of the shawl he had fastened round her, and felt kindly towards these cousins, who perceived his charm. She did not think he had a wife. 'He has not told me anything about her.'

'Perhaps he'll have one soon, though. Is that it, Jane? Oh, she is a sly girl, see how she blushes, Emily. She is not going to let poor me have a chance. I must say you looked quite a pair when we saw you on the pier. He had his arm round you in the most suspiciously affectionate style. No wonder he laughed when mother told him, you were "always fond of the lads." Well, I should be "fond of the lads" myself, if I had the luck to fall in with one like that. He is "perfectly sweet," as the Americans say in novels.'

'Yes, you are very lucky, dear,' said Emily with a sigh when her sister stopped, 'if he only turns out as nice as he looks. And I think he is awfully fond of you, but then men are so changeable,' and she sighed again as one who knew the evil ways of the sex.

'Oh! he adores her,' said good-natured Lizzie, 'not a doubt of it, and I am as jealous as I can be.'

Jane ought, in consistency, to have felt very angry at all this free talk, but truth compels me to state that she heard it with delight. The MacLures ought to be good judges. They knew all about men, both civil and military, and were well qualified to pronounce on their intentions. Let her enjoy the pleasure, were it only

for this bright afternoon, of believing that he looked kindly upon her. To be sure, the MacLures had never looked so pleasant in her eyes as now, when they were joking about her in this vulgar way. Where had her fastidiousness flown, her dislike to hear even her name roughly handled. Ah! human nature is a funny thing.

'You must bring him out to Cairndrum while mother and I are there,' said Emily eagerly, 'and I'll see that no one bothers you. What opportunities you have, to be sure. Really, Jane, you only daughters are to be envied; let's see, I'll make Mrs. Archie write you a note. Which day shall it be, Saturday or Monday perhaps? I daresay it will be all settled by that time.'

'What nonsense you talk,' said Jane, and yet not displeased.

'That's an awfully pretty pin, too; I'd make him give it to me first thing if he was my cousin, I know. Ah! here he comes with mamma in tow. Well, he's a saint, I do think, bothering with an old body like her!'

CHAPTER XVIII

AUNT MACLURE

By the time that Frank, having comfortably adjusted Mrs. MacLure and her wraps, had slipped into his own place by the side of his cousin, the steamer was passing the mouth of a lovely glen which stretches deep into the pleasant uplands of ——shire. Past high and steep cliffs it puffed along, and at last leaving the bounds of the loch was out in the open sea. Not even the melodious voices of the brass band could spoil the delight of the hour to Jane, as the boat went onward in the pleasant sunshine. In front of them rose up the grey and hoary rock, the home of countless birds whose dwelling-places were doomed to be disturbed, as often as a pleasure trip came by. Bang, bang, bang, all Ailsa's echoes answered to the impertinent report, and the air was darkened for a moment by the whirr of innumerable wings. But a second discharge was unavailing, the birds' momentary fear was over, or their stock of complaisance exhausted for the day, and the Loch-

towners had disappointedly to admit that the spectacle was not to be repeated. Jane and Frank found themselves alone for a moment.

'Have I been good?' he said softly, with a wave of his cigar in the direction of her aunt. 'You must be very kind to me now to make up for the spoiling of my treat. Can't we go somewhere to-morrow by ourselves?'

'Perhaps,' said poor Jane, who indeed would like nothing better.

'But who was his loving Lilla?'

It is difficult for a home-bred person like Jane Frederick, to believe in the existence of a male flirt, such as you London ladies seem to be so accustomed to. Is not India too, according to Rudyard Kipling, a perfect hot-bed of affairs of gallantry? Perhaps, 'dear, dearest Frank,' was in the habit of corresponding in those affectionate terms with half-a-dozen ladies, and meant nothing by it but a moderate friendliness.

But to a home-keeping girl of homely wits, it seemed a strange cruelty to smile so sweetly as her cousin did, to speak in that dear confidential tone if he meant nothing by it, nothing, less than nothing, some one named Lilla being installed in the throne of his heart. She looked at him with vexed eyes in which a question was lying. Her lips, always frank, almost put it to him, but she had self-restraint enough to keep it back.

'You are cold, dear. Your head aches?' he asked anxiously; 'the sun has been in your eyes.'

'Oh no!' said Jane, 'it has been delightful. And think of your birthday cake, tea will be waiting when we get back. I think I'll go and sit by Aunt MacLure. It is rather amusing to watch the dancing on deck if one is not expected to take part.'

'Come then,' he said, and she found he was to be with her all the time.

After all, Mrs. MacLure was disappointed of her expected frolic. 'Not a bit of spirit in you Lochtown folk,' she said. To be sure, all the 'Glasgow bodies' had gone off to Castle Hamilton (leaving the boat but thinly peopled), whence they might be expected to return full of mirth and jollity, when the *Princess Royal* reached the pier again.

Jane sat listening to her aunt's large discourse with amusement. It drove 'Lilla' for the time out of her head to hear her descant on the charms and amenities of the West End of Glasgow, where it was her favoured lot to live. She praised the shops, the University (the College, as Glaswegians love to call it), the New Municipal Buildings, the Cathedral, the tramways, and last if not least the Necropolis. One would think they were all the works of her own creation and providence. She glanced in passing at the shipping and trade of the city, took the credit of its increase in population as shown by

the last census, and wound up with a panegyric on the 'bonny U.P. Kirk' she attended, and the minister she sat under.

'Come you to 16 Albany Gardens, Mr. Hay, make Jane bring you, and you'll be very welcome to Mr. MacLure and myself, and a good sermon I can promise you, if you care about sermons, and a good dinner and a comfortable bed after it.'

'It's a most seductive programme,' said Hay, smiling; 'I shall certainly keep it in mind.'

'Remember that, Jane. You have been terribly stay-at-home the last few years, but I hope that's to be changed now, and we are always glad to see you in Glasgow, and if there was any shopping or anything of that sort you had to do, as young ladies sometimes have, you know, *extra particular*, that your mamma, poor body! might not have the strength for, why, as I was saying, the Glasgow shops have the name of being next to Paris for the fashions, before London itself, not to speak of Edinburgh, with its far-back stuck-up ideas.'

'Mamma, you are terribly eloquent to-day,' interposed Emily, 'and if you once get on your hobby of running down Edinburgh you'll never stop. You are encouraging her, Mr. Hay, that's where it is, and she'll talk herself hoarse.'

'Well, well, Jane,' said the elder lady good-humouredly, 'I'll have a talk with your mother; I dare-

say she'll be thankful for a little help when the time comes.'

Aunt MacLure was certainly rather a dreadful relation. One could not predict the things that she might take it on her to say, and to stop her when started was a work of difficulty, only to be undertaken by fearless persons like her daughters.

Probably Frank Hay did not understand more than half of her discourse and innuendoes. That was the comfort Jane took.

But men are not always so dense as their female relatives are apt to suppose, and when he sat twisting his moustache and smiling, I expect he knew very well what Mrs. MacLure was driving at. Presently he strolled off, and was seen in talk with John at the other end of the boat. They seemed to get on very well, judging from the laughter which accompanied their pipes.

'John is boring Mr. Hay with some of his absurd stories, I can see that very well,' said Lizzie. 'Dear me, Jane, you have been wonderfully good-tempered, I must say. It must have been an awful sell to you, when you saw all of us grinning and waving at you, when you were expecting a nice quiet time with your young man.'

'You are determined on my wish for a *l'le-à-l'le*,' said Jane. 'I am very glad Frank should be so well amused as he seems to be with John. I am not perfectly convinced that he is dying to be always in my

pocket, you know. He has had a good deal of my company during the last few days.'

But now the shore was reached, and the trip was over, and Mrs. MacLure and Emily found Archie's dog-cart, a smart little trap with a man in livery, awaiting them at the end of the pier.

'He's a capital chap John,' said Frank, as he and Jane plodded homewards. 'Really, he told me some awfully good stories, and he seems a thoroughly honest well-meaning fellow besides. What kind of man is Uncle MacLure?' he went on. 'I supposed she was a widow till the very last.'

'In those bright colours?' asked Jane. 'You do not know my aunt, if you suppose she would mourn her husband in anything but the most overwhelming "blacks." Oh, he is a very respectable man, harmless to a fault. It is my own aunt who is so very dreadful, there is no possibility of glossing her over. At least you know the worst. I can't promise to produce any odder relative for your inspection.'

Jane laughed a trifle bitterly. Yet she was glad that, as she said, the worst was over. Aunt MacLure was by many degrees the most aggressive of her father's people.

'Oh, don't take it too seriously,' said Frank, 'I am not going to be too glorious over you because my aunt is nicer than yours. You *will* own the superiority of my Aunt Mary to your Aunt MacLure, I suppose? Has the

good lady no name of her own, that we should cling to her surname so steadily ?'

'She has an admirable name,' said Jane, mollified by the bone her cousin took (as one who should say, "A straw for all the vulgar aunts in Glasgow"). 'Her name is "Jane." "Jane Frederick that was" is the style by which she often introduces herself.'

'That accounts for much,' said Hay. 'Jane Frederick that is, and Jane Frederick that was—no wonder my cousin is snappish. But don't let her weigh on your mind, I can assure you she reminded me exceedingly of a Duchess who came home from Colombo with me—and every one said she had such charmingly aristocratic ways. You don't understand what's fashionable nowadays. You are a thoroughly benighted little snob, and out of date altogether, my dear.'

'Of course I am a snob,' said Jane, restored to good-humour, 'that's what I have often told mother, I am a snob of the worst sort, because I try to pretend I am not. But your Aunt Mary is perfect. There's nothing mean about her. She is so nice to Aunt MacLure, and yet I don't suppose she likes her any better than I do. At all events she ought not, for she is not her blood-relation.'

'And that counts for a great deal, doesn't it?' said Frank.

So talking they reached home in amicable fashion,

and found the mother whom they were agreed in praising, awaiting them with her table spread.

'I called for Mrs. Kennedy,' she told them with pardonable pride in her own activity, 'and what do you think I found—really I thought it spoke very well for the lad—Mr. Millie, that young minister you remember, Frank, that I told you of.' ('I know him, Jane and I spoke to him yesterday.') 'Well, here he was sitting reading to her, and had been doing so for more than an hour, she told me. She said she had not had a treat like it for long, and the window was open, and quite a pleasant air coming in from the garden. My poor old friend seemed quite freshened up and like herself again. He has promised to come twice a week if she likes it, and read her anything he is interested in. "I weary whiles of Anne's missy stories," she said, "Mr. Millie is to give me something to stretch my old brains upon."'

'Missy stories, I daresay, poor old lady,' said Jane delightedly, 'of all the wearisome rubbish those "bookies" of Anne Kennedy's are the dreariest and wershest. Frank, do you know what "wersh" means? I must take you to see Mrs. Kennedy some day, and ask her to speak Scotch to you. She has lots of good old words one hears from no one else.'

'By the way, dear,' said Mrs. Frederick, 'Anne came in before I left and she sent a message to you. Her *dear* love, and she hoped *so* much that you would be

able to go with her this evening to the meeting, Mr. Millie holds every Wednesday in the Baker's Wynd, and she was sure you would enjoy it, for it was always a sweet and precious time.'

'Don't you think your Aunt Mary is a bit of a mimic?' asked Jane. 'People in Lochtown don't know her. They think her so excellent and solemn, they never suspect she is laughing at their little ways.'

'I am not laughing,' she protested, 'I am repeating faithfully what I promised to tell you. Poor Anne, I am sure she is a worthy creature, but she has not half the sense and the fun that her mother has still, in spite of her age. Will you go, Jane? She said she would call for you in plenty of time, and I was so pleased with that lad's kindness to Mrs. Kennedy, that I thought perhaps you might do worse than go and hear him on an occasion.'

'To please him or myself, or for my edification?' asked Jane pertly. 'Oh, mother, you are a silly old lady, you think your daughter's company is of importance to other people. Because you like to have me, you imagine all the world must be of the same opinion.'

'Perhaps I do,' she owned. 'Besides, I am afraid I am like the boy that could not say "No," and I saw that Anne Kennedy was set upon coming for you. Must you go, Frank?' as her nephew rose. 'Then good-night, unless you care to come back and sit with me while Jane is out.'

'Thanks, I may possibly have something to write,' he said, looking graver than he ordinarily did. 'At all events I'll be round in the morning, if you are sure I am not the plague of your lives.'

'My dear boy, you are the greatest pleasure,' said his aunt with the tears in her voice; 'I don't know what I shall do without you when you go away.'

'Then I had better not go,' he replied briskly. 'Should you like me to settle in Galloway as a bonnet laird? Jane and I are to make excursions all round, in search of a ruined tower that I may purchase. I assure you, I am not going to be easily shaken off.'

CHAPTER XIX

THE WINGS OF A VOICE

It was a bare room with a few bright-coloured texts hung round the walls by way of ornament, in which Millie held his weekly meeting.

He stood up alone on the small platform at the end of the room, and the hearers sat on hard benches ranged across the floor and against the walls. Anne Kennedy led Jane up to the end of the side bench, next the speaker's place, which seemed set apart by fashion for the more genteel part of the audience. It was not an exhilarating company which met the young man's eye as he stood up and faced his hearers. Jane thought she had never seen a more stupid unresponsive little crowd. How they scraped their feet against the deal floor as they settled themselves, and fidgeted in their places. How they cleared their throats and even spat. She was glad to be sitting between Anne Kennedy and a handsome-looking girl, who was surely M'Culloch the baker's daughter, rather than among the people in front. Was

it possible that one could be hopeful over these odds and ends of humanity, Irish beggars some of them, old men and women with 'hoasts,' restless dirty girls with shawls round their heads, and one or two lads with torn jerseys and hair standing up in disorder? What message could Mr. Millie have for them, which Miss Kennedy thought would be 'so helpful' to her, Jane Frederick? He might read them 'Christmas Eve' and 'Easter Day,' which was such a good description of them, and they would not recognise the likeness. How stuffy the room was already, how heavy the air! Lochtown gas was doubtless the worst-smelling in the world, and Jane was thoroughly cross, and out of heart with herself and her surroundings.

Then the service began. Ah! after all there is something in it. Something, did I say? 'Oh!' (with a swift rush of compunction and reviving) 'there is everything.'

Strange that on the wings of a voice one can feel one's soul rise up into happy regions, above the worry, and griminess, and sorrowful forebodings of our earthly life, up into the place where live the great realities, the blessed certainties of God and Christ.

Jane was ashamed of her scorn of these poor people, of her heaviness over her own lot, of her eagerness for pleasure and for love.

And what had wrought the change? There seemed

to be nothing but a low voice confessing sin, asking for pardon, speaking of a hope we did not of ourselves invent. A calm fell upon Jane's spirit. Her case was in good hands—the best. It did not matter so utterly as she had thought, whether this or that were to fall out after her desire. While Heaven remained, the best remained. She sat very still while the hour lasted. She was hearing, hardly heeding, the speaker's comments on one of our Lord's parables ; she was still in a happy hush, a curious dreamlike state, in which the story of the lost sheep seemed to have little message for her. She was glad she had come ; it had been good to come ; yet she could not have told you what the address had been about. As they rose to sing the last hymn—one of those which seem empty or full of meaning according to one's frame of mind—Millie turned suddenly and their eyes met. His had a wistful look which struck her heart. Who gives him comfort while he gives to others ? She hoped heartily he shared the help he gave. When the ragged regiment had filed out, he came down from his elevation, and shook hands with those who lingered.

‘A number of people to-night,’ Anne Kennedy began purring in his ear. ‘One feels sure there must have been a blessing ; such a precious portion of Scripture, and then the sweet pressing home. You know Miss Frederick, I think ;’ then in a loud whisper, ‘this is

only her first visit ; I hope the beginning of very many.'

Millie smiled, and Jane did, what was very unusual with her, she said to him : 'Thank you very much ; I am very glad I came.'

His face flushed with pleasure, but before he could reply a soft voice interposed, as Geordie M'Culloch, who had been standing at the door to see that the audience retired in due order, came up : 'A fine meeting to-night, sir, and some of the poor bodies really impressed. Good evening, Miss Kennedy,' in his obsequious way ; 'you are always one of the faithful' He looked with anxious eyes upon Jane, whom he knew by sight of course (in Lochtown no one is unknown), and in whom he hoped for a possible customer through Mr. Millie's good word. His daughter—a good-looking, showy, dark-eyed girl—was busying herself in tying on her veil and buttoning her tight-fitting jacket, but now approached at a sign from her father.

'This is Miss M'Culloch, Miss Kennedy, my daughter, you know. She's finished with all her schooling, and governessing at last. It is a pleasant thing to see the young interested in the Master's vineyard,' he said, with a bow which was meant to include Jane ; 'but, indeed, it is no wonder, with such a rich feast as has been spread for us here to-night.'

Jane stood a little aside. Millie had gone to get his

hat, which was in the little slip of a vestry. She wished Anne Kennedy would come. What was the use of lingering now to listen to the good baker's platitudes. Miss M'Culloch stared at her with scrutinising interest, while her father continued his remarks.

'The minister has promised to come home with us to-night. Him and my daughter have always plenty to say to each other,' he went on; 'they have both been highly educated, one may say, so that it's no wonder he is fond of a chat. Tell Miss Kennedy, Helen, about that book he sent you on your birthday. You'll doubtless have seen it, ma'am, Selections from some one, Blackie,—no, that's the auld birkie of a Greek professor that wears the plaid, but I'm sure it was some name like that.'

'Browning,' said Miss M'Culloch scornfully, her dark eyes travelling over Jane's jacket as she spoke.

'Ay, Brownie or Blackie, I kent it was some colour.'

'And here's Mr. Millie. Perhaps you or the young lady might have something you wished to say to him, miss, so me and my daughter will just step on. We must not be greedy, when, as I was just saying, we are hoping for your company to a bit supper later, sir.'

'All right, M'Culloch,' said the young man, hurriedly gathering up his Bible and hymn-book as he spoke. 'This way, Miss Frederick, it is a little dark I am afraid, and the steps are worn.'

'Ah!' for at the foot of the stairs a figure had been standing unseen, against whom Jane, with dazzled eyes, stumbled and almost fell.

'Is that M'Culloch blocking up the way? The gas should be lighted here.'

But Jane had only stumbled against the friendly arm of her cousin Frank, who stretched out a hand to steady her.

'Did I frighten you, dear?' he said gently. 'I thought I would come to take you home, and I might have known I should startle you. Won't you take my arm? Why, Jane, you are shaking. What a clumsy ass I am!'

Jane was glad the entry was so dark. Her nerves had been strained all day, and she felt the foolishlest wish to burst out crying. She could only cling to Frank's arm, the smooth sleeve of that covert coat which was like no other coat in Lochtown, and listen meekly while he explained himself to her companions.

'No! Miss Kennedy, I'm not a burglar. I thought I'd come and see you and my cousin safely home. I had a lot of letters to write, or I should have been here sooner; but I hope to have better luck next time, Millie. Come and look me up at the George some evening, won't you, and have a pipe.'

'Good night,' said Jane, recovering her equanimity, 'we must not keep you waiting'; and with a parting smile she went away.

‘She always says that to me,’ thought Millie discontentedly, as he turned down the street alone after M’Culloch and his daughter, who were, as he was well aware, waiting for him round the corner ; ‘while she and the cousin go off together, and I follow meekly after Geordie M’Culloch.

‘Yet he seems a nice fellow ; it was civil of him to ask me to call. He probably has a wife and family. A man of that age is sure to be married, and I am probably jealous without any foundation.

‘She said, “Thank you, I am glad, very glad I came.”’ So feeding himself on this crumb of comfort, he went to do his duty in the baker’s parlour, where he doubted not a warm welcome was ready for him.

If our Covenanter’s head had not been so occupied with his own affairs, he might have understood that this warm welcome was not a thing he had any right to count on. He ought to have known that for a time he had been in disgrace, and but that a family council had decreed that he should be forgiven, and the fatted calf killed in his honour, he would have had no invitation to supper to-night.

We are outspoken in Lochtown, and when the widow Neilson came in full of the fact that the minister’s ‘engagement,’ which prevented his presence at Nelly’s birthday feast, was only a tea-party at Mrs. Frederick’s, and that ‘it’s mair than likely she’s catchit

him for that lass of hers,' plain truths began to be bandied about in the family.

'It's a disgrace if he evens himself to get marriest outside the body,' said Mrs. McCulloch, with righteous wrath in her bosom; 'whatna ensample would that be to the folk.'

'It would be a sore discouragement to us a', nae doot,' agreed Geordie, in more plaintive accents, 'but I canna believe it of the minister, me that's aye upheld him, and been like a father to him in the Session.'

'Weel, ye may believe it or no as ye please,' said his sister, sniffing triumphantly, 'I can e'en tell ye what I saw, and what I heard. He was fair glaikit I thought, and if it wasna love maybe it was something waur. "And how is your rheumatism, Mrs. Neilson?" says he, in his mincing English voice, set him up, and me that never had rheumatism in my life, but near death's door with bronchitis times without number, as I'm sure I have tell't him till I'm hoarse. "Rheumatism," said he! The laddie's head is just turned with the notice the gentry take of him (braw-like gentry, to be sure, that live in a bit two-storied house in North Street); but gentle or semple, ye're a' alike: "Mr. Millie" here, and "Mr. Millie" there, and, "O sic a precious young man," and "Have ye heard our minister?" till he thinks a' Lochtown's in his gift, take it or leave it.'

'And suppose Mr. Millie did take tea with Mrs.

Frederick?' asked the clear voice of Miss M'Culloch, who had listened, with undisguised contempt, to her aunt's harangue, 'was there anything very wonderful in that? I do hope, mother and father, you won't be so idiotic, as to make any difference to him because of that. I'm sure there are not so many intelligent people in Lochtown, that we can afford to quarrel with Millie for a trifle. Why, he's about the only man worth speaking to in the place; and as for Jane Frederick, she's plain enough in all conscience, and as old as the hills besides; I don't fancy he has any thought of her, whatever she and her mother may suppose. She hasn't even any education to speak of. There were no decent schools in her day, I daresay; and as for any idea of dressing, or making herself look stylish, the thing's absurd. So, I just tell you plainly, that if Aunt Neilson is to be allowed to rule in this house, and drive all the young fellows away with her ridiculous prying and mischief-making, why, she can do it, but I won't stay in Lochtown to see it. I can easily get another situation. Girls nowadays don't need to hang on at home, if home is not made comfortable for them.

'I imagine Millie was sorry enough he was engaged that afternoon, and he meant to say so, poor fellow, when he sent me this book. I don't know that he could have been much more explicit; not that I care much for poetry—it's all rather rot. One got such a

dose of Milton for the local exams, that it sickened me of the whole concern. Still, it's the correct thing to send a young lady poetry when one wants to show her attention—that, or flowers, and there are not many flowers at the manse. And Browning's all the go nowadays.'

Even Aunt Neilson quailed before Miss Nelly when her mind was made up. So it was decided that Mr. Millie's attentions should be encouraged, and himself forgiven for his recent defection.

It would be a crown to George M'Culloch's life to call the minister his son-in-law. And when he heard his Nelly speak so coolly of the prospect, he did not know whether most to admire her courage, or to tremble at her daring hopefulness. She seemed to have made up her mind to have him, and when had Nelly failed in anything she had attempted? It was in blissful ignorance of any design, that Millie was ushered by his elder into the parlour, where the supper-table was already spread. He felt dutiful and rather bored. How much he should have preferred a quiet pipe in the study, which had acquired a new charm since he had begun to plan which seat should be his wife's!

But youth is hungry, and Mrs. M'Culloch knew how to cook a sweetbread in very tempting fashion; the coffee was fragrant, and the cream abundant. And presently our young man was talking pleasantly and freely to

Miss Nelly, who was in an amiable mood, and asked not one startling question, that could bring a blush to the most modest cheek. Millie really loved his work, and never appeared to more advantage than when he was talking about books, that he had found helps to himself, and was eager to recommend to others.

Perhaps he had done this girl an injustice. Had she not been at the little meeting that evening, which showed her well disposed at least to listen? She had an intelligent face and bright eyes, and it was not her fault that she had not been brought up by a lady mother, and had to acquire all her culture for herself. She knew the names, at all events, of the great men that lived, and wrote outside of Lochtown. So he talked, and she smiled with flushed cheeks that showed her interest, and the parents listened, impressed and well pleased. Geordie, an inveterate gossip, deserved praise for the Spartan way in which he sat silent, nor endeavoured to draw the talk into the more familiar channels in which his interests lay. Mrs. M'Culloch contented herself with filling the minister's cup, and pressing the 'fancy bread,' which, to be sure, would be stale before Friday, when all the farmers were bound to take some home from the market. Millie felt the reward of a good conscience, in the sense of a duty pleasantly performed, as he went home; and Nelly M'Culloch was not perhaps to blame, if she went to bed with the feeling that, for

once, with her also, duty and pleasure were to go hand in hand. She meant to make the minister a very good wife, to bring her parents' grey hairs (which, indeed, were not yet very apparent,) with honour to the grave, and to fulfil the natural expectations of the upper ten in the kirk at Lochtown.

What had Geordie M'Culloch given his daughter that grand education for, if not to fit her for this vacant post?

'And he's a much better-looking fellow than Sandy M'Gowan, or young Cunningham at the Knowes, or even Foster the English doctor himself. And a minister's before a doctor any day. Jane Frederick, indeed, with her old-fashioned serge suits! I don't suppose he'd look twice her way. Coming poking into our church because there's not a lad to be found in her own. But she shan't have Millie, I can tell her that,—with all her proud, stuck-up airs, and her no more than a doctor's daughter herself,—nor that silly body Kennedy neither.'

So ran the maiden's thoughts before she fell asleep, not discontented with the events of the evening.

CHAPTER XX

HIS DEAREST DREAM

MY DEAR MRS. FREDERICK,

I am sorry to say that my husband is so exceedingly unwell, with an attack of his *old enemy* gout, that he is quite unable to reply to your last letter. I am now sitting by his sofa, and he has asked me to let you know how ill he is. He desires me to say that, 'so far as he knows, there's nothing wrong with Frank Hay, except that he is a confounded prig, (pray excuse the expression), who sets up to be better than his neighbours. He imagines the fellow's well enough off, but he hasn't told him his affairs.'

Your nephew has not introduced any lady to us as his wife, but I think it right to add that he was accompanied to England (so my friend the dear Duchess of Birghamshire tells me) by a young person of colour, of whom he spoke as his 'ward,' but I am afraid we all know how elastic such a term is. Personally, I was not favourably impressed by Mr. Hay. His manners seemed to me brusque and presuming, and his Church principles shockingly lax. My

husband desires his kind love to yourself and your daughter,
—and I remain, dear Mrs. Frederick, affectionately,

MILLICENT LE DESPENCER HAY.

Such was the letter which Mrs. Frederick received next morning from her seldom-seen sister-in-law Lady Millicent Hay.

Even her gentle spirit was ruffled by the cool insolence of the writer's style. 'Really, Frank might have waited till he was able to write himself, if that is the sort of letter his wife produces. I can form an opinion on my own nephew's manners, I hope, without her assistance. I wish he would come and explain what she means about the girl, for I suppose it was a girl who came home with him. Some convert from one of the Missions, that he was asked to look after, I daresay. It is odd how those English great ladies are so fond of trumping up a scandalous story. Things that decent people ought to be ashamed even to think of, far less write about.' All these thoughts passed through Mrs. Frederick's mind as she sat silently by the fire, waiting for Jane, who was in the back garden feeding her pigeons. 'It is a bad letter,' she thought, 'a heartless letter; I shall show it straight to Frank, and I am sure he will explain it quite simply, and, as Jane does not know the post has come, there is no need to show her the letter till I know what it means.'

Just then the front gate swung back, and a boy from

the George was to be seen coming up the path. Mrs. Frederick hastily slipped her letter into her pocket as Jane came into the room, a fresh spray of white jasmine in one hand, and a note she had taken from the messenger in the other.

‘Nothing more interesting than a circular for me by the post,’ she said cheerfully, ‘but here is something from Frank ; I hope he is not ill.’

The note ran thus—

‘DEAREST AUNT—I found a telegram when I got home last night, which makes it necessary for me to return to town at once on a most distressing and troublesome matter. I intended to have spoken to you about it yesterday, but put off, and now it must wait till I get back, which I hope will not be long. There is no use entering into the story—which is a long and sad one—on paper ; I could explain all to you much more easily when we meet. My address is—

—— Hotel,

London, W.

Dearest love to you, and please remind Jane that I am counting on her to take me about next week, when I have every hope I shall be with you again. I am off in five minutes, so excuse this hasty scrawl—from yours,

F. M. HAY.

‘Let me see it, mother,’ said Jane, kneeling on the rug. ‘There, take that bit of jasmine ; it is the last on the bush, and Frank will annex it if you don’t.’

'Poor fellow, no,' said her mother, in a troubled voice ; 'he has gone.'

Jane read the note rapidly. 'He is very mysterious,' she said ; 'he might have told you this long sad story last night if he had wished, while I was at the meeting with Anne. What *did* he talk about, mother ? I don't think you told me anything he said ?'

'We had a nice talk,' said his aunt, 'but he told me nothing sad. I wish he had been more explicit about this secret,' as she took the note from Jane and replaced it in its envelope ; 'I am not fond of hints.'

'But he hopes to be back next week,' said Jane, beginning to pour out tea, 'so you won't have so very long to wait ; and of course if he got a telegram, the morning train was the only one to take. We must keep up our hearts, mother, with the hope of his return. At the worst, we lived a good many years in Lochtown without our Francis, and perhaps we can survive his loss.'

'Oh yes, poor fellow ; but we have been happy with him, and I am not fond of sudden changes and journeys. Things were very well as they were.'

'Yes,' said Jane, with a short sigh. So this close pair of friends sat down to breakfast, for perhaps the first time in their lives, each heart heavy with a secret, concealed for the other's sake.

And Frank, who could piece the two parts of the story together, was speeding southward with a good deal

of worry indeed, but not of the sort his friends in Lochtown each feared he was oppressed by.

He might have been gratified had he known the blank his absence made in the little feminine household. Life seemed to stand still all that day. To be sure it poured (as it often pours in Lochtown), but all the small domestic occupations, that go to make a rainy day an agreeable interlude in life, seemed to have lost their savour for Jane. She was disgusted with herself when she found it was so. She tried to keep up a show of cheerfulness, read aloud to her mother, practised a song, did a good bit of her embroidery, laughed and talked, but did not feel any the happier.

What had become of all the high thoughts and dreams of the last evening ; where was the lofty courage, where the unbroken peace that were to be hers henceforward ?

Well, we learn by experience that we are not made perfect in a short time.

But when the mid-day dinner was over, and her mother's afternoon nap in progress, a lightening came in the clouds, and Jane went out for a walk. She followed the road round the bay, an admirable one for wet weather, for if any road would dry quickly it was that. The clearing was from the westward, and though heavy clouds yet hung over the north and east, and mist lay low over the brown hills that shut in the view in those

quarters, over the western waters there was a glittering pathway of sunbeams.

A grey and gold world it was, and a fresh damp air was blowing in from the sea, and long-legged birds were standing on the flat sands that stretched out towards the small gold-crested waves. Jane loved the strip of grass with its wealth of sea-pinks, and sea campanulas that edged the gravel beach. On she went, feeling lighter and happier-hearted than she had done all day. The dull town, with its smells and shrill voices, was behind her, and only rural scenes and dancing waters bordered her road on either hand. She tramped on steadily mile after mile, unwilling to turn again and leave the pleasantness and freedom behind. But time was passing, and her mother must not be neglected; so, having climbed the highest point in the road, whence it descended between high grass banks by imperceptible degrees till it lay by the loch again, she took a wide, long look around her, and then reluctantly turned her face homeward. Round the corner came some one with head bent, speeding swiftly as usual. He stopped when he saw her. 'What a lovely evening,' he said, with a pleased smile of greeting. 'Have you come out for a breath of fresh air?'

'Yes, and I am sorry to go back,' she said, giving Millie her hand, 'Lochtown has been so muggy and hot, and here it is so free.'

‘May I turn with you?’ he asked boldly, ‘I saw some tramps coming down the road from Balhaffie, and I shouldn’t like you to meet them alone.’

‘I don’t think I am afraid,’ said Jane, smiling, ‘but if you are sure you are not shortening your walk on my account, it will be very pleasant to go together. I always find the walk out from Lochtown exhilarating; but the slow return when one is getting tired, and the town grows plainer and plainer, redresses the balance, and one is apt to go back much as one set out.’

‘But I should not imagine you needed exhilaration,’ he said, happy in the permission to accompany her; ‘you look so—so bright; one associates you with sunlight, and fresh air, and happy things.’

‘Do you?’ said Jane, secretly gratified by his opinion; ‘but you know that’s all nonsense, that’s because my hair and eyes are light. You dark-coloured people always suppose fair hair goes with high spirits. I can tell you I am often very dismal indeed, even morose.’

‘Yes, they were ill-looking fellows; I am sure I should not have liked to pass them alone, with my watch in its bracelet asking to be snatched off,’—as two stolid-looking Irish beggars lurched past. ‘And there is not a person in sight, nor a gig in the offing to which I could have appealed.’

‘I am glad I noticed them,’ said Millie, ‘or I might not have been at hand.’

'And have you been reading to Mrs. Kennedy this afternoon,' so her tongue ran on ; 'Mother told me how much the poor old lady enjoyed your visit ; but of course you can't have time to go every day. I forgot that it was only yesterday mother met you there.'

'Has time been going so slowly with you ?' he asked, with the quick instinct of jealousy, longing to know whether she had spent the day with her cousin. Where was he ; why was the fellow not with her now, allowing her to wander about alone like this ?

'Doesn't it always go slowly in Lochtown ?' feeling the silliness of her words, but silent on the subject of Frank.

'No,' he said, 'life is monotonous, but I think it passes quickly. To be sure I may not be a fair judge, for I am pretty fully occupied with my work, and visiting here and there among my people. No, I can't say it is slow ; I sometimes think it is too fast. It is rushing away in an endless succession of futilities. Have you (but I am sure you haven't)—have you ever felt what we call "a perfect scunner" of it all, Miss Frederick ?'

'Often,' said Jane ; 'often.'

'What Miss Rossetti means when she says—

'In a dream it overleaps,
A world of tedious ills,'

he went on eagerly. 'Oh I am glad you know the feeling.

‘To where the sunshine sleeps
On the everlasting hills.

‘Yet it’s not always that for which one’s heart is longing. It’s to get out of the little ways of life here ; to get into wider ways, more congenial.’

‘But if I were you,’ said Jane bluntly, ‘I think I should go. Can’t you leave Lochtown? Don’t wait till it is too late ; I should say “go,” if you possibly can.’

‘You advise it?’ he said, stopping on the wet road. ‘Perhaps it might be best, perhaps it has been foolish to refuse. If another chance came——’ going on again slowly, as he saw he was detaining her.

‘Oh I don’t know,’ said Jane, vexed to have her words thus seriously weighed. ‘I am speaking at random on general principles, not making plans for any one. Isn’t it true that if a man finds his development is being cramped in one sphere, and another opens to him, he ought to take advantage of it? And it *is* a wearisome little place, you know. No one would willingly spend a lifetime here.’

‘Perhaps not,’ he said ; ‘but sometimes it seems transfigured. An evening like this—— And then one might not find any such happiness elsewhere. There are mad dreams that can make Lochtown look like Paradise.’

‘Oh! one can have dreams anywhere,’ said Jane hurriedly.

Such a wiseacre surely must disgust any man. She was turning a sort of oracle upon his hands, yet he seemed to draw inspiration from her words.

'You think so too—you have felt that,' he said, with a radiant smile, 'poor Lochtown, it is not to be despised then; and you think I do right to dream—you give me leave to go on dreaming,—perhaps you will let me tell you my dearest dream some day.'

Jane was uneasily conscious that the young man was moved and excited. She did not wish to continue this intimate talk.

'Oh! here is that young lady who was at the meeting last night,' she said, glad to withdraw his attention from herself. 'M'Culloch the baker's daughter, is she not, and a reader of Browning too, as her father told Miss Kennedy. She looks a clever girl. I rather envy girls the good education that they get at High schools. They teach things so thoroughly, don't they?'

'Do they?' said Millie vaguely. 'Ah! I suppose they do, but I am not sure that I admire thoroughness.' He was rapidly pulling himself together, for he was proud, and quick to take a hint, such as Jane had surely given him, not to go farther to-day. Her voice was troubled, he was swift to note. Perhaps she understood what his dream was; she would not be his lady if she were too ready to listen. Jane thought the M'Culloch girl had rather a bold face, as she smiled in a half-defiant manner at Millie in passing.

'I suppose those well-educated people who are not ladies often have uncertain manners,' she reflected. But at least she had served the turn by making a change in the conversation easy. And the town was now close at hand and so was tea time ; and when a young man walks to one's door with one, it is only an act of common civility to invite him to enter, especially when the first drops of a shower are falling.

He meant to refuse ; he did not wish to thrust his company on any one.

But nature had endowed Jane Frederick with a very pleasant kind face, and a simple manner ; and, as in the beginning, the young man was tempted and fell.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. AND MRS. FERGUSON

MRS. FREDERICK was sitting by the fire in that pleasant little room, that had remained an ideal place in Millie's memory since his last visit, and she welcomed him very kindly. She was glad to see him, for she had conceived a great liking for him, and his kindness to old Mrs. Kennedy had secured his place in her favour. Jane's mother was one of those people (how few they are when one begins to reckon them over), in whose presence every one shows his best. Whatever is good about us comes to the surface, whatever is mean or evil hides its head ashamed. One or two such we have known, and their memory is fragrant still ; not cleverer than others perhaps, but sweeter, and, ah ! how unforgotten.

He liked to listen to her gentle voice. Jane was indeed at an advantage who was blessed with such a mother. He meant to stay only a short time lest he should be troublesome, but before he left, the door was thrown open and ' Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson ' were announced.

It is strange, when one considers, that we have been so long writing of Lochtown without the introduction of this worthy pair. For to do justice to the intense dullness and commonplaceness of the town, it is necessary to have made their acquaintance. They were both middle-aged, middle-sized, of middling looks, and certainly of mediocre intellect. Mr. Ferguson, who was the minister of the church which the Fredericks attended, preached moderately well, and his wife acted as organist and choir mistress, playing a harmonium with a fair amount of skill, and singing with respectable success. They were such thoroughly unremarkable people that they were much respected in Lochtown. Certainly no one hated them. It is to be doubted, on the other hand, if any one could have been named who loved them.

Mrs. Frederick probably made as near approach to doing so as any one could. Mr. Ferguson had seen the last days of her husband, and had conducted his funeral; while Mrs. Ferguson had lost a baby boy from scarlet fever—enough to invest them each with a halo for that tender heart.

‘A dreadfully wet afternoon, Mrs. Frederick,’ said the minister’s loud hearty voice. ‘I was telling Mrs. Ferguson here you would be afraid of our wet clothes, but I think we have managed to keep ourselves pretty dry after all. Waterproofs are a wonderful invention to be sure. Ah! Mr. Millie, I did not expect to find *you*

here. Mrs. Ferguson and I had heard so much about a gentleman, who was going about the town with Jane, that we thought it our duty to come and make inquiries. Ha! ha!' and he laughed heartily at his own wit.

'Yes indeed, we are quite disappointed,' chimed in round-faced Mrs. Ferguson. 'Such a fine-looking man he is too, I hear, though I have not been fortunate enough to see him myself. Your mamma's nephew, I understand. So pleasant for you both, I am sure.'

'It was delightful,' said Jane frankly, 'but I am sorry to say he is not here now. He had to go to London on business; however, he hopes to return next week. You know Mr. Millie, I think?' as the good lady subsided into a chair.

'Oh! to be sure,' she said, 'but Mr. Millie must excuse me, I was not looking to see him. It was Mr. Hay that we have all been so interested in, you know,' and she laughed like an echo of her husband.

'Your mother quite well I hope?'—turning patronisingly to the Covenanter, who, tall and dark, stood ready for an opening to take leave.

'She was very well when I last heard,' he said, rather stiffly; 'she is not with me at present.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Mrs. Ferguson, her eyes intent on the cups of tea which Jane was pouring out. ('Oh, not so much sugar, if you please, for Mr. Ferguson, and no cream for me, Jane; we are both getting too stout,

as I tell the minister, to go on taking fat-formers.')

'Perhaps you are thinking of filling up her place then. Ha! ha! Every one in Lochtown thinks it's time you were doing your duty. It's not fair to the young ladies to keep them so long in suspense, you know.'

'Here, Mr. Millie, will you kindly help me with the scones?' said Jane, deftly thrusting a plate into his hands. She was afraid of what Mrs. Ferguson might think fit to say next, and an ominous cloud was gathering on the brow of the young man. 'Mother will perhaps take another, and I can look after Mrs. Ferguson.' She saw the darkness disperse from his eyes as he stood beside Mrs. Frederick, and it was with quite a genial tone, that he responded to some challenging questions from the minister on his church and private affairs.

'A stiff fellow that,' was Mrs. Ferguson's comment as she sipped her tea. 'But he need not be so proud. People are saying Geordie M'Culloch is determined to have him for his daughter; but to be sure that might offend the rest of the elders. I daresay he finds it better to remain single. They say he is growing more and more fanciful in his sermons, and that the older people are thoroughly tired of him. However, I can't answer for the truth of that. Being the minister's wife, of course I could never think of wandering; and I cannot say, any time I *have* heard him, I was very much impressed. What do you say, Jane?'

She looked sharply at her as she spoke, but our heroine, though of a simple nature, was not to be drawn on this subject, and she answered aloud to Mrs. Ferguson's confidential whispers.

'I really don't know enough to give an opinion.' Then, 'By the way there is something here I kept for you,' and so resolutely plunged the good lady into the Report of a Missionary Society, in which it was her duty to be interested.

Millie was leaning against the chimney-piece waiting for his dear Mrs. Frederick's cup, with the look of well-being on his face, which so many people seemed to wear in her presence. She held it out to him with a smile, and then he took his leave.

Jane shook hands with him in an unembarrassed friendly way. 'I am not keeping your book too long, am I?' she said, not unwilling to show Mrs. Ferguson that he was at home in other circles besides the M'Cullochs. (It is a shame to try to snub the poor youth just because he preaches better than her husband.)

'The book! Oh, Browning! I hope you will keep it as long as you like,' he said eagerly. 'Is there nothing else you would care for? Please tell me if there is.'

'Very *empressé*, I am sure,' was Mrs. Ferguson's comment, with a disagreeable little laugh, as the door closed behind him.

‘Do you think so?’ said Jane. ‘We find him very pleasant.’

‘Does it strike you that Jane Frederick is setting her cap at young Millie?’ asked Mrs. Ferguson, as she and her husband jogged homeward through the rain. ‘I have been told by two or three, that she was in his church the Sabbath before last in the afternoon, and Mary M‘Growther saw her last night, at that meeting he holds in the Baker’s Wynd. Yes, and more than that, Sandy Thomson’s girl saw them in the train, coming back from Harbourhead a week or two ago, and she told her father they seemed remarkably chief.’

‘Gossip, my dear, gossip,’ said the minister wisely. ‘You ladies are all so ready to imagine a love affair. I saw no appearance of any *tendresse* between them; indeed, if he was paying attention to any one, it was to the old lady.’

‘Well, I can only say I hope there’s nothing in it; but Mrs. Frederick is getting weak, poor body, and Jane is well on now, and may be losing heart about a husband. That fanciful poetical stuff I am told Millie gives his people, may please her better than the pure gospel she gets in her own church; and I suppose some might call him a good-looking fellow, though to my eyes there’s a want of refinement in his style. And as for social position, we all know what that would be. I have no doubt her bit of money would be a temptation

to him, but it would be a sad downfall for Jane in a worldly point of view, not to speak of anything more important.'

'Well, let us hope there's nothing in it,' replied her husband soothingly; 'and really I see no ground for alarm so far.'

Mrs. Ferguson shook her head sadly. 'One never knows, one never knows; and it is best to be prepared for disappointments.'

She was a woman who saw farther than most; and I fear Jane was not a great favourite with her minister's wife.

CHAPTER XXII

EVEN THAT

THE days which followed were true specimens of Lochtown life, as led by Mrs. Frederick and her daughter. 'The days after the Flood,' Jane called them, the Flood being understood as that great epoch when Frank Hay arrived, and the fountains of the great deep being broken up, the new tide of life rose high and submerged old landmarks.

'But now the waters are falling and the earth appearing again,' she thought. *The History of the Norman Conquest*, like some immense antediluvian beast, presented itself before her, and not much more alive than one of them might have been after its submersion. (I must not continue the metaphor, I who remember with much satisfaction the perusal of that great book; but perhaps my circumstances were more propitious to study than Jane's. Give her time, and I promise you she also shall completely master it.) *The Norman Conquest* lay on Jane's lap, but the pages were not

often turned. No letter came from Frank, and Mrs. Frederick began to worry very much over his silence. Archie MacLure called on Market-day, as he often did, bringing a note from his wife, in which she invited her aunt and Jane to come out to Cairndrum, 'and on no account forget Mr. Hay, of whom I hear such charming things.'

Mrs. Archie was a young lady who prided herself on her easy epistolary style, and on the way in which she had identified herself with her husband's people. Having been the daughter of a manure merchant in Greenock, the MacLures rather looked down on her from the heights of Glasgow gentility. But let that pass.

'Gone to town! Oh, I'm very sorry,' said honest Archie, with a disappointed whistle. 'Emily told me he seemed a real good sort of chap, and I was looking forward to seeing him. But you'll come, aunt, you and Jane, I hope. You haven't seen wee Jack since he went into a sailor suit; you'll think him grown, I can tell you.'

'I am sure I'll admire him, dear lamb,' said Mrs. Frederick with that gentle sympathy which long ago won Archie's heart. 'But I hope my nephew will be back again very shortly; so if Alexandrina will allow us to say next Saturday instead of to-morrow, it would be only deferring the pleasure, not losing it altogether.'

'Oh yes, Frank is sure to come back,' said Jane

briskly. 'Tell Emily to keep her best clothes for his benefit, and I'll take care that he admires them.'

'Well, Emily is a nice-looking girl,' said Archie, following the lead he was given, 'and she is very well dressed, I must say. I always tell Alexandrina I can't afford visits from my sisters, for they put such extravagant ideas into my wife's head; a poor farmer can't keep up with the Glasgow West End notions.'

'Your mother's looking rather pale, isn't she?' he asked, as he strolled with Jane in the garden, while Mrs. Frederick, ever punctiliously polite, was writing a little note to Mrs. Archie. 'She looks worried about something.'

'Oh no,' said Jane, 'that's nonsense. What should she be worrying about? She enjoyed seeing my cousin, and the thought of his father, and the old days, excited her, but only pleasantly. Do you think she's pining for him now? We liked him very much, of course, but I hope we can exist till he comes back.'

She spoke rather rudely, but Archie was not quick to take offence. 'I was not thinking about him,' he said simply. 'I was wondering whether there was anything troubling her that I could help or advise her about. So many of those banks have been breaking. One finds lots of people have money in them as shareholders or depositors, and old ladies sometimes take alarm unnecessarily, and think they are ruined when the

trouble may be only temporary. But if you say she's all right, I am sure I am glad. There is no one I think more of than your mother, Jane, as I daresay you know.'

'Perhaps she *is* pale,' said Jane with swift contrition, 'and you are very kind, Archie. She often says how much she leans on you.'

'It's a good thing Archie M'Lure has a rather thick head,' she told herself as the young farmer strode away down the street, 'or he would see how I gave myself away about Frank. But *is* mother worrying over him? Is she doubting him too? Oh, that horrible Lilla! Yet I don't believe he cares for her. "Your loving Lilla," oh! who is she? what does he mean?'

A long Saturday passed slowly by, unbroken by any incident except the weekly visit to the cemetery, which Mrs. Frederick or Jane never omitted to pay, to lay the mother's flowers, however few, on the grave of her little sons.

'Your father was so kind, he used to do it for me when I was not able. But he did not like flowers for grown-up people, so I have always given them to the boys.'

Jane sometimes wondered if her mother remembered how old the boys would have been now, had they 'been spared' as the old Scotch phrase has it, which sounds very tenderly on patient lips. But she said

nothing as she read the inscription on the stone—‘John, aged 6, and Francis Hay, aged 4, infant sons of John and Mary Frederick. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.’ She did not grudge them the little wreath which spoke of their mother’s undying love.

Not till Sunday night, when the day was over, dying in a splash of wind and rain, and mother and daughter sat over the fire alone, was the subject uppermost in both their thoughts spoken of between them again.

‘What do you think of him, mother?’ asked Jane, lifting her mother’s hand as she spoke, and slipping on to her own finger the ruby ring with its centre of brilliants, which it had been, in her childhood, a Sunday evening treat to wear.

‘Of Frank?’ said the mother simply, ‘he seemed to get far ben with me at once; I would fain, fain think well of him—and yet.’ She sighed.

‘But why should you not? What harm do we know of him; I suppose a man of his age may have lots of business he is mixed up with that you and I know nothing of. It is a very simple life we live here in Lochtown. Isn’t that the great recommendation of the place?’

‘He has an honest kindly way with him,’ said his aunt meditatively; ‘a person might lay burdens on him,

I think, that were not his own, and he would do his best to bear them.'

'Burdens,' said Jane; "'a long sad story" was what he said in his letter, but as for burdens. Don't be so obscure, mother, it's not like you. Ah!' with a quick gasp of intuition, 'do you know something more, something you have been keeping from me?' The girl did not know how pale she had grown, but she felt the sick throb of her heart.

'Yes, dear,' said the quiet mother, 'I have a letter here, but I hope it means nothing much. I believe Frank will be able to explain it. I got it that morning that he went away. It has been vexing me ever since, for I love the lad.'

Jane read Lady Millicent Hay's note, and threw it back on her mother's lap with scorn.

She said nothing for a minute, then, with an angry laugh—

'The dear Duchess of Birghamshire! Frank told me about her—that part of it is true at least; he said Aunt MacLure reminded him of her. What is a young person of colour, do you imagine? Remember I asked if his mother were black, and you thought it so dreadful; according to Lady Millicent he is going to have a wife of that complexion. I suppose that is what she means?'

'Something of that sort, I suppose,' said Mrs.

Frederick, 'a wife, or perhaps a child—she says "a ward," as if the girl were young.'

She spoke in a low unwilling voice.

'A child,' said Jane. 'Oh no, it could not be that, it is not that.'

'I think not, I pray not,' said Mrs. Frederick, 'but we must remember men's ways are not ours, and Frank may have slipped; and it may be his duty he is doing now, his duty as a Christian man——'

'But it is a cruel letter. And, Jane,' she went on, gathering courage as she saw her child sitting there with bent head and hidden face, 'we need not believe anything bad of him at the bidding of that woman, and that Duchess of hers. It is a shame to let ourselves be swayed by every evil tongue. Frank may have done no harm; and at the worst, we should be thankful that he has the grace to repent. That ought to make us strong to bear the disappointment.'

'A ward,' said Jane, looking up and speaking in a tone that tried to be cheerful; 'she says a "ward," and we have no reason to suppose that Frank is a liar, have we? Why should he not have a ward if he pleases? You haven't any more letters in your pocket to spring upon me, I suppose?'

'Ah! forgive me, love. I know you haven't; I know you kept that one from me, only for fear of vexing me. No! I am not going to tear it up, nor throw it into the

fire. You are to keep it, and show it to Frank when he comes to tell you his "long sad story." And then, perhaps, we may laugh over it, and be glad we believed in him in spite of the dear Duchess of Birgham and Millicent Le Despencer Hay. Le Despencer! wasn't that some one in the *Scottish Chiefs*? It's quite too splendid a name for an ordinary mortal?'

'It *was* her name once,' said Mrs. Frederick, 'Lady Millicent Le Despencer; I suppose she could not bear to part with it when she married your uncle. Hay is certainly shorter.'

'Now, mother,' said Jane, going over the letter again, 'we must try not to be too tragical. Let us face the worst. Let him have a wife. Can't we bear it? I believe the thing that makes you most angry in the whole matter is that impertinence about Frank's manners, "brusque and presuming"—who asked her to give an opinion?'

'She is not very civil, certainly,' said the mother, as she took her daughter's hand and kissed it with a very tender kiss; 'and you know your mother is touchy about her belongings. I was always fond of my own.'

'And Frank is your own,' said Jane; 'poor Frank, that we are so ready to give up. But oh!' she said, and she fell suddenly to tears and sobs, 'he was so nice, so dear; we could have loved him so well.'

It was no use to pretend they were satisfied, and Mrs. Frederick did not make the attempt.

It is a disadvantage to have high ideals of life and conduct, if one wishes to live comfortably in this disappointing world.

But they were a little sudden in their judgment of the absent, were they not? They should not have taken him so quickly to their hearts, if, at a word, because of one or two suspicious circumstances, they were to feel bound to turn him out.

Happily, if some one makes his way into our hearts, we find it more difficult to dislodge him than to let him in.

And so it was likely to prove in this case.

When the gas was out, and Jane lay quietly in the darkness, she reviewed the matter in her mind. Lilla was the ward then—the young person of colour. He was her ‘dearest Frank’; was she his ‘dearest Lilla’? How horrible it was; and yet perhaps she drew some comfort from what had seemed at first an unbelievable idea. His child? His own child, although she might not know it? Such things were. Oh shameful laxity! she might forgive him even that.

Then his kind looks might still have meaning; his words of self-depreciation—‘it is not for me to be exclusive, after all that has come and gone,’—might be plain expressions of regret for a spotted past. He might have the right to be seeking for a new home, a fresh beginning; he might, oh yes, there need be no barrier,

no insurmountable barrier, between him and a happy wife! It was well the darkness covered her, for the rush of absurd delight that came to her with this thought, brought the blood to her cheeks, as she blushed with shame at her own boldness.

That hour was a secret that lay in her heart for ever.

But she could never be very hard on other people's weakness, when she remembered what she had once been ready to condone, for the sake of her swift-risen love.

CHAPTER XXIII

FROM WORRY TO CONTENT

As may well be imagined by those who know Scottish character, not a word on the subject of Frank Hay was spoken by Jane or her mother when they met again. Their hearts were certainly lighter—Mrs. Frederick's, because she was disburdened of her secret; Jane's, because she had an inward hope that Lilla was not Frank's 'dearest' after all.

It is not easy to express in writing the grounds of what may be nevertheless a pretty strong conviction; and Jane allowed herself now to remember, and dwell on certain little facts which have not been set down in this history. You have been told something of how they walked and talked together, what they said and what they did, during the long two days or three of their companionship; but I have not attempted to tell you how Frank looked, and the kindness his voice had expressed.

He was either a rather heartless flirt, or then—and Jane was beginning to believe it—he had a tenderer feel-

ing for his cousin than he had yet told her in words. On the deck of the steamer she had been assured that the MacLures' quick eyes detected his interest; as they came home together from Millie's little service she seemed to be made certain of it very sweetly.

It is so much easier to give a person up when one is not sure that the sacrifice will be demanded. Frank was gone—Jane was assuring herself he might never return, with a secret hope that any day might bring him, and that, if he came, it would be for ever.

So the mother's heart was comforted about her daughter, as she saw her set a happier face to the duties of the new week—the new week which was full of possibilities, not least, of Frank's return.

That day came at last—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and on Thursday he was there.

Jane went out very early in the forenoon. Perhaps she had a premonition that this would be the day of the traveller's return; at all events, when he came softly up the path, as he had come a week before, it was only his aunt who looked up at the click of the gate; it was only her gentle face that smiled a welcome to him when he opened the door and came in.

'Are you glad to see me?' he asked, when, the first greetings over, he was sitting with that look of being at home that had taken his aunt's heart by storm. 'You ought to be, if you are only half as glad as I am to

be back. But where is Jane? Gone out. She's early abroad surely; I could have been here half-an-hour sooner—(discontentedly)—if I had known you were such early people, but I was afraid I'd be in the way.'

'Oh she'll be back in good time for dinner,' said Mrs. Frederick, not sorry to see him a little put out at his cousin's absence. What mother dislikes to see her daughter sought after?

'That's a long time to wait, isn't it? Perhaps I might go and meet her if she's gone far; a walk is the best freshener after a night journey. But tell me first how you have been since I left. Free of pain? that's good; though you are not looking very splendid, not so strong as I like to see you.'

Mrs. Frederick was uneasily conscious of the letter with which she ought to confront him, when he relieved her of the task by saying:

'A week to-day, and a most unpleasant week it has been—no end of worry, though I hope things are put right, for a time at least. Have you patience to hear about it, I wonder?'

'Oh yes, my dear,' said his aunt, thankful to have the disagreeable task of questioning thus spared her; 'I am interested in all your affairs—who should be more so than I?'

'Well, it's not exactly my affair, though I have the bad luck (no, poor thing, I should not say that, for I am

the only person she has to look to), but at all events she is in my charge. This is the short and the long of it. I suppose you have heard of my Uncle Harry Lambourne? No? Well he was my mother's brother, and she thought no end of him; and when I went out first, a young chap, she thought it a very fine thing that I had such a good friend in Calcutta, who could put me up to everything, make matters straight for me, and all that. So he did, poor old chap. He was awfully good to me, awfully kind, but—well—Aunt, you know he was not quite what my mother thought him—no end of a good man of business he was, and honourable and honest too, but not—well—not the clean potato in some ways. He was good to me though, and when I got into a scrape about some races once (I was a thorough young ass in those days, and thought it swagger to bet upon horses that I knew as much about as the cat there)—— Well, I owed 3000 rupees, and had no more chance of paying than I had of being Governor-General, and I was in an awful fix, and I wrote to Uncle Harry, and he wired at once "All right," and I believe I sat down and cried with joy. It was kind of him, wasn't it, and I swore I would never forget it.

'I used to go and stay with him when I got short leave, and he was always the same to me, a jolly hospitable kind friend; but as one gets a little sense, one

sees that sort of life is not all it looks on the outside, and—well, I grew to be sorry for the poor chap. It was not a house ladies went to, Aunt—you understand ; it was not a home to be comfortable in as he got up in years.

‘ I went back to stop with him eight years ago, just after I had news of my mother’s death, and by that time I had begun to look on things differently, you know, and I tried to speak to him—to turn him to—to—Christ and that ’ (here the speaker’s face grew red, and he pulled his moustache as was his way when moved), ‘ and I was clumsy about it, and I suppose he thought me meddling in matters I had no business with. At all events he told me not to come back till he sent for me, and he would be in no hurry to do that.’

Frank sighed and took out his eye-glass and polished it silently.

‘ Yes,’ said Mrs. Frederick, deeply interested.

‘ Well I heard no more from him. I sent him books once or twice, religious books I mean ; perhaps it was cowardly not to try writing to him more directly, yet the books said what I meant much better than I could, and after all he was my uncle, and had a right to tell me to keep my preaching to myself. Then a week before I was starting for home—last April that is, I thought I would make one more try at seeing him, so I wrote him a line from the Club, saying I’d come at such an hour if he did not forbid me.

'Poor old Uncle! I am for ever thankful I wrote. An answer came at once, brought by an old fellow who had been his khansamah for fifty years—since my grandfather's time—a native of course, and an awfully decent old chap he is. He came himself, with tears in his eyes, and begged me to come to his poor master, for he thought him dying, "and he won't see the Padre Sahib, nor the Doctor Sahib even; but when he saw your chit, he said, 'Bring Frank Sahib at once, at once.'"

'And did he listen to you?' cried Mrs. Frederick. 'Oh! could you do him any good?'

'I don't know,' said Frank sadly, 'at least I could pray for him, and he was very kind and gentle, and he made no objection when I offered to read. There was a girl sitting by his bed, a half-caste girl,—a handsome creature she is. He took her hand and told me she was his daughter—he spoke of others, but I understood they were provided for, and this was by a different mother. There's no doubt he was fond of her, and he wished her to have his name—"Lilla Lambourne," she's called. He told me he had left her in my charge, and £5000 to be a provision for her. It seems she had been taught English, and could read and write; and his idea was that she should be sent to England to be under the charge of a lady (in fact he had begun to make arrangements when he was suddenly taken ill), for three or four years, to learn European ways thoroughly. He

planned that afterwards she was to take a post in a school for half-caste girls he has left most of his money to found, and for which I suppose there is much need. He was extremely well off, you know, and there will be ample funds; but how the whole business will work out, it's hard to say. He left me £10,000 by his will, which was made two months before his last illness began; so you see he had forgiven me, although I did not know it. He was always kind to me except that one time when I spoke to him. I daresay I did it very badly.'

'And what came of Lilla?' asked his aunt. 'But to be sure you brought her home.'

'I did indeed, and no end of trouble she has given me, the young monkey,' said Frank with an exasperated groan. 'But how did you know that, Aunt Mary? I was so happy, in having a holiday from her, that I'll swear I never mentioned her to you. If you only knew the comfort it is to be in a room that's not stinking with sandalwood and musk. Poor little Lilla! I am sick of the very name of anything Indian. And yet it's not her fault that she's half a savage, poor child. Only one sees the charm, the difference.'

'Why, what's this?' as Mrs. Frederick unlocked her desk and gave him Lady Millicent's letter to read.

'I am sure I am much obliged to her ladyship,' he said, with an angry light in his eye. 'Is Lilla supposed to be my daughter, or what?

'Oh, Aunt Mary, be glad you are not a woman of the world. You can tell her I am not a liar, if you please, when you write. "The term is elastic," I never heard such mischievous rot. If she had the trouble that I have had with my "ward" during the last week, she'd know how much elasticity there is about it. The silly girl ran away and was lost for a whole day. Then they telegraphed for me. And when she was found she threatened to take poison if she was not allowed to be always with her "Dearest Frank, her dearest guardian, her only friend." Upon my word it was exasperating to hear her in her horrible Calcutta English, and she is so impassioned. Can a fellow keep his temper when she dashes about the room, whipping out little daggers from her hair, with which she offers to cut her throat or mine one moment, and the next is cramming herself with all manner of sickly sweetstuff, and squirting scents upon me, and she hugs my knees—upon my word she does; she'd kiss my boots as soon as look at them. No! you needn't laugh, Aunt; it is no joke, I assure you.

'And I put her with the kindest people, old friends of my mother's, who take a real interest in her for the sake of the Lambournes, and she tries to make out that they are cruel to her. It's a most annoying affair altogether, I can tell you.

'There she is,'—he spoke with a sudden change of voice from worry to content. 'I'll open the door for

her.' So Jane, as she came back, found herself greeted by her cousin. How nice he looked! How glad she was to see him! Dreams and night thoughts took wings and fled as he stood there in the doorway. He had come, and pleasant things were to begin again. Her smile answered his happy look.

'Oh, when did you arrive?' she asked. 'I half thought you would come to-day. Have you seen mother?'

'Yes, we have had a long talk,' as he hung up her cloak in the hall. 'I have been telling her all my bothers, and she has been comforting me.'

'Poor thing!' said Jane, with a laughing imitation of her mother's voice. 'And how does Lochtown look after London—as grand as ever, I hope?'

'I am awfully glad to be back,' he said, following her into the dining-room; 'you have no idea how long the week seemed—not the least idea.'

'Of course not, time never passes slowly in Lochtown—does it, mother? And Mr. Douglas is much better this morning—the doctor thinks he will get round; his poor old sisters are so pleased. Miss Sophia sent you her kind love, and thanked me for coming to ask, with tears in her eyes, more than once. So I am very glad I went.'

'That's very nice,' said Mrs. Frederick, gently taking Jane's hand as she sat on the arm of her chair. 'And

isn't it delightful to have Frank with us again? I was just telling him how much we had missed him.'

'Yes,' said Jane, gathering from her mother's tone that she wished to convey that her talk with her nephew had satisfied her. 'I doubt not you have been puffing him up and flattering him nicely. It's a way she has, Frank, a nice little way that makes us all fond of her.'

'It's a very soothing sort of way,' he said, looking at his aunt fondly, 'and one that's not too common in this world.'

'Well,' she said apologetically, 'I have not so very many people to spoil; I must make the most of those I have. Jane, what are we to do to amuse this gentleman now we have him with us?'

'Offer him the newspaper,' she said promptly, 'while his cousin takes off her hat.'

Presently Jane came singing downstairs, a book under her arm.

'Can you put up parcels neatly, Frank?' she asked, 'you look as if you could. Here is paper and a charming bit of string; and I am so very stupid, I wish you would do it for me.'

'I'll do my best,' he said briskly, taking his seat at the writing-table. 'Now what shall I put on it,' taking a pen, after he had deftly tied the parcel, and snipped off the ends of string with his pocket-knife.

‘Say—“The Rev. Henry Millie, with many thanks,” please.’

‘How neatly you write,’ said Jane, looking over his shoulder and seeming in a patronising mood. ‘A distinctly lady-like hand, I call it ; far better than my great scrawl. Thank you so much.’ She went out of the room with her parcel, and committed it to Fanny, to be taken to its destination.

‘Had he no curiosity?’ she thought, rather piqued. ‘I suppose *he* has got hundreds of parcels from his lady friends in India. He might have looked at the book’s name, though.’

Frank was standing by the fire when she came back, and she sat down meekly, and took up her knitting.

‘What have you been doing all this time?’ he asked. ‘Have you been taking any long walks while I was gone, or making any voyages?’

‘Nothing remarkable has happened,’ she said, making a little pause over a dropped stitch. ‘I think it has rained a great deal. Once I tramped round the bay between showers, and I met Mr. Millie, and he came back to tea ; but it began to rain again, and seemed to pour ever after. That was the very day you went away, though. What have we done, mother? We have felt rather flat, I think, without our visitor ; but the time has slipped away somehow.’

‘You have read to me a great deal,’ said Mrs.

Frederick, 'that makes the day pass pleasantly; but, as you say, we wearied for Frank.'

'By the way, mother, I met Anne Kennedy this morning—you know her, Frank—and she told me she hears there is scarlet fever in the High Street, one or two pretty bad cases. Mr. Millie told her so yesterday, when he came to read to her mother. Some of the Roman Catholics in the Back Wynd, behind M'Culloch's shop, have taken it, and Anne seemed quite afraid for herself, not to speak of Mr. Millie.'

'Well, it is a dreadful scourge,' said Mrs. Frederick gently. 'I am sorry to hear it has begun among the Irish, for, when a fever once gets a hold in their houses, it is apt to spread all through the town. You'll be careful where you go, Jane, and where you take Frank. I can't help being nervous about scarlet fever since I lost my little laddies, and Jane, here, had it so badly, you know. You'll be careful, Frank?'

'I?' said he, 'I am surely fever-proof by this time. I count myself as good as a doctor in that respect, but Jane is another matter. We'll go right out to the country, and run no risks. Round the bay, did you say, you went the day I left? Suppose you take me this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do?'

'I know I must be an awful nuisance, coming and infesting the house like this,' he went on, picking up

Jane's ball and laying it on her lap ; 'but it's a lovely day for a walk, isn't it?'

'I'll be very glad,' said Jane. When he looked wistful and a little doubtful, who could help being kind to him?

When Henry Millie came into his study that afternoon, he found the parcel Hay had tied up, lying among his papers on the table.

He did not at first guess what it contained, but began methodically to unloosen the knot. (Is it a fact, by the way, that men are more averse than women to hack a good piece of string into pieces? And if so, can it be traced to the abiding impression left on the male mind, by Miss Edgeworth's story of *Waste Not, Want Not*, which relates how Ben prospered so exceedingly by reason of a piece of whipcord?)

Be that as it may, Millie patiently worked at the knot as he read the superscription, 'with many thanks.'

His Browning displayed itself at last, and he eagerly shook it in search of some possible note or card. At least he had the brown paper, and the string her hands had touched, and the delicate, lady-like handwriting. How well his name looked written by her hand? The shapes of the H of Henry, and the M of Millie were charmingly quaint. Just what he might have expected from her. Everything she touched gathered grace and distinction.

CHAPTER XXIV

CORBY HOLD

AND at that moment Miss Frederick was standing at the same point in the road, where Millie had joined her a week ago. But she and Frank Hay were not looking over the sea, discussing the immensities. On the contrary, they had their backs turned to it, and were considering the possibilities of Corby Hold as a place of modern residence. It was a square tower that had once been the seat of a family with which the Hays had repeatedly intermarried.

‘Our great-great-grandmother was a Corbet,’ explained Jane, ‘and her mother was a Hay; but her father sold it to the Lord Culcreuch of the time, and it has belonged to them, the Culcreuchs, ever since. It looks such a nice little place up there among the beech-trees; but it is shut up now, not even used as a farmhouse. Could you not take it, Frank, and do it up and live in it? Mother and I would come out from Loch-town and have tea with you; we would sit on basket-

chairs up there on the flat roof, and eat strawberries and cream, and you would have telescopes lying about, and we'd sweep the loch with them, steadying them upon the machicolated battlements! Oh! and the three red escutcheons of the Hays should float in an argent field from the flagstaff. And every time you went out for a walk you'd pull down the flag; and when you came in you'd hoist it again, like those people in one of Mrs. Oliphant's books. I can fancy the whole thing splendidly!'

'Come, now, and let us look over it,' said Frank. 'It's not a bad idea at all. Do you think Lord Culcreuch would let me have it? John Hamilton, his youngest son, used to be rather a pal of mine some years back. Do you mind coming so far?'

Corby Hold stood up against a wooded bank, white and square and solid against the brown foliage of the beeches. There was no way of getting into it, however, as the cousins found when they had crossed a couple of grass-fields and gone round the keep. The Corbet arms, paleways with the Hays', were sculptured in a shield over the small entrance door; grass grew up to the sturdy walls, and the corbies, from which the place may have been named, were flying round the broken battlements of the roof.

'It has possibilities,' said Frank hopefully, as he gazed up and around.

'It would be awfully interesting to see it made habitable again,' said Jane. 'Fancy having it floored and painted and papered—no, I don't think Corby Hold ought to be papered; perhaps hung with Arras, or at least Arras cloth. And then, choosing the furniture and getting ready the flag! I may embroider the flag, mayn't I, Frank,—red escutcheons on white silk?'

'That sounds a trifle tournamentish, doesn't it?' said her cousin doubtfully. 'I think, to begin with, we ought not to go beyond bunting.'

'Then I'll have an arm-chair, or, at the very least, a tea-cosey. I am yearning to get at those nice little shields. You don't think a tea-cosey too ambitious, I hope?'

'It will be beautiful,' said Frank, with conviction. 'Do you know, Jane, that once, when I was a small boy, I sewed a kettle-holder for my nurse with the red shields? I planned out the number of stitches to each, but somehow they weren't a success; my hands were rather hot, and the white ground somewhat dingy before the thing was finished. My aunts laughed at it, and I cried; but my mother gave me sixpence, and said I was a clever little boy to have done it at all. Here is the sixpence still,' he said, showing it dangling from his watch-chain. 'I was a spoilt little chap, I daresay. At all events, I always think of my kettle-holder and my wrongs, when I see our arms.'

‘Poor wee boy,’ said Jane, pleased with the story. ‘I think it was horrid to laugh at you.’

‘Do you imagine there is a stair inside?’ he said, peering through a crevice in the boards, which formed a rough, temporary door. ‘It would be a satisfaction to know if there is any means of getting up to the scene of our tea-drinkings. Seriously, Jane, should you like me to make inquiries about the place? Is there any other suitable house in the neighbourhood you can think of? I have a dream, perhaps it will never be more, of buying Craig Hay some day. I heard lately that it may possibly be in the market soon. The man who bought it does not care for it, and has been saying so to some friends of my Uncle Frank’s, throwing out feelers, I fancy, to find out if he has intentions about it. But in the meantime, I’d like a small place to live in while I look about me.’

‘Craig Hay!’ said Jane rapturous, but astonished. ‘Craig Hay! Oh, Frank, you could not please mother more.’

‘That’s right,’ he said, well pleased. ‘I’d like to please her—and you.’

‘It would be glorious,’ said Jane; ‘it would be like a fairy dream to mother to see you in Craig Hay. She has never been able quite to forgive Uncle Frank for selling it, after Uncle John left it to him. I believe it was Lady Millicent’s fault, was it not?’

'Oh "poor woman!"' as your mother would say, 'she is not a Hay, you know, and perhaps it was the wisest thing to be done, burdened as the place was. It gave them some ready money to buy that little box at Richmond that they are so proud of. I fancy,' smiling at the recollection, 'that she was not very much pleased with something I said to Uncle Frank about it last month, when he was praising up its snugness, and all its little cockney conveniences. I could not help remarking that Craig Hay was bigger, if it was not so trim; and Lady Millicent was down on me at once.'

'Oh! that accounts——' said Jane, and then stopped herself, blushing painfully.

'For her not being favourably impressed with my manners,' he said sharply. 'So you read that letter too, and perhaps—no, I won't say that. I am sure *you* did not believe it, Jane.'

'It was horrid,' she said. 'Don't speak of it, Frank, I don't like it.'

'I won't,' he replied grimly; 'it's not an agreeable subject, or a pleasing view of human nature.' He tossed away his cigar as he spoke, and stood leaning in silence against the strong old tower, with his hat pushed up from his brow.

Jane looked at him a little timidly, and strolled off by herself, returning presently to ask him where he proposed to plant his garden.

He looked at her dreamily, as if only half understanding, 'The garden—I suppose there must be a garden; I had not thought of it.'

'Of course there must be a garden to grow the strawberries in,' said Jane, and he followed her dutifully about, while she invited his attention to the beauty and size of the old beeches on the slope, and showed where she thought a pretty garden might be made, on the sunny side of the tower.

'And it was here you met the tramps,' he said, as they were walking homewards; 'that afternoon that I went away, you know? I don't think I like to have you walk about these roads alone. Suppose your friend Millie had not been with you?'

'They would not have taken the least notice of me, I daresay; and you must remember I have walked alone all my life.'

'But I did not know it,' he persisted, 'and that makes all the difference.'

'How silly you are?' she replied, but not ill-pleased.

Something seemed to be troubling him all the way, however, and as they neared the town he said suddenly: 'Suppose all that had been true, Jane — all those things Lady Millicent hinted—should you have cared a little?'

'Oh, I thought we were not to speak of it,' said Jane.

'But we must speak once ; suppose Lilla had been anything more to me than an unfortunate little wretch I have to look after, suppose there was anything wrong about her—should you have cared ?'

'Cared,' she said, 'of course anybody must care when horrid things are true.' She looked at him rather indignantly, 'I don't know what you mean ; are we made of stone, do you think ? Of course we'd have cared.'

'I am very glad,' he said humbly ; 'that's all.'

'You are very easily pleased,' said Jane.

'Do you think so ?' he began, but before he could say anything more, Anne Kennedy appeared, happy and voluble, and Jane was not sorry that the talk with her cousin should be interrupted. Having heard him call Lilla an unfortunate little wretch, she was satisfied to let things rest as they were. Perhaps Frank was not a person so easily pleased as she thought. She was beginning to perceive that she had found her master.

Next morning he came in with a fresh piece of information. 'I'm off again ; you are rid of me for twenty-four hours at least, and it's a pleasanter piece of business this time. Whom should I see last night coming off the steamer, but the very fellow we were talking of, Jane, John Hamilton, Lord Culcreuch's son ? He's to be at his father's for a few days only, and he wishes me to go there with him this morning. It will be a good chance to inquire about Corby Hold, though my aunt thinks

it's a daftlike place to speak of living in, there's no harm in asking about rent and so forth. I'll be back before Sunday anyhow, for I am going to church with my aunt, in spite of all the Jack Hamiltons in Galloway.'

'But Cairndrum,' said Jane, 'your visit to Mrs. Archie? Has mother not told you of the chance of seeing Aunt MacLure again?'

'I am afraid I forgot, I am awfully sorry; but let's see, I could get there in time to bring you home,' said Frank, a man who revelled in time-tables, and was at his ease in an Ordnance Survey Map. 'Jack Hamilton's a real good sort—one of "Mount Plunkett's Lambs," as half-a-dozen of us were nicknamed—and I thought it was a good chance to hear about Corby Hold, and have a chat with him at the same time.'

'It's a very good plan,' said Mrs. Frederick. 'There's nothing to apologise for. But as for settling in Corby Hold, the thing is absurd, I must say.'

'See what it is to have no imagination,' said Jane regretfully; 'the strawberries on the battlements don't appeal to her at all, and she is blind to the delights of hoisting the flag. Perhaps we are too poetically minded, Frank.'

'Speak for yourself,' he replied, 'I am one of the most prosaic men going; I do nothing without a purpose. If aunt won't allow me to stay in Lochtown without an excuse, I have to provide myself with one, and the

reconstruction of Corby Hold ought to last me a little while.'

'And suppose you die of bad drains and damp and rheumatism in the meantime?'

'My aunt will be able to say "I told you so," which I understand would be comforting to the mind of a lady; and if I can't get Corby Hold I shall look out for something else till the time comes for Craig Hay.'

'That's the sort of millennium you dangle before mother's eyes to keep her happy—the great day when a Hay shall reign again in the house of his fathers.'

'Just so,' said Frank; 'it's something to look forward to.'

CHAPTER XXV

NELLY M'CULLOCH

THE Reverend Henry Millie had a letter-box at his garden gate; not that letters were so numerous in Lochtown that the postman would have been overworked had he gone up the path, and delivered them at the door of the manse.

'But it is a great saving of trouble, no doubt; and when the parish minister has one, and there is talk of the Free Kirk and both the U.P. Manses being provided with these conveniences, it is only seemly that our pastor should have one as well.'

So said Georgie M'Culloch at a meeting of Session, and accordingly at the Covenanting Manse a box there presently was.

In this box that Friday evening, when the minister went out in the softly falling dusk, a white billet was lying. He took it out, and his heart beat wildly when he saw the handwriting, and he opened the envelope with he knew not what hopes.

A sheet of paper inside, without date or heading, bearing these words: 'Harbourhead, To-morrow, 4 o'clock.'

Could he be making a mistake in the dark?

He went back hastily to the study where the fire was blazing brightly, and examined the paper by the flickering light. The envelope bore in the firm, delicate characters that he had admired before, his name—

'The Rev. Henry Millie.'

It was unmistakably from her, but then what did the message mean? What kind thought had prompted her? Could she, oh! was there not almost profanation in the idea? Could she by some wild chance wish to show him that she was ready to listen to his dearest dream? Into the clear pool of the young fellow's heart the thought fell like a burning firebrand, and the waters rose and hissed and gulfed it in with fury and with steam. If she meant *that*, and he gasped for breath, but no! it was unbelievable both for disappointment and delight. 'She is in distress, she appeals to me for help and comfort! Ah, it is that—she wishes to keep from her mother some perplexity in which I can help her. Her cousin has gone and has not returned. It may be some unpleasant matter connected with him. And she turns to me—to me in her distress. A lifetime will not be too long to show her my gratitude for this.'

'She is proud ; she would not willingly seek the help of a stranger, but with me—she feels herself safe.'

He put the precious message back in its cover, and then in his innermost pocket. 'There it lies close over my heart,' he thought, as he grasped his stick and went forth on his round of pastoral work which included a visit to Georgie M'Culloch. He had to talk over, with his henchman, the arrangements for a forthcoming social meeting of the congregation, all the homely details of which Georgie had at his finger ends.

'No, the master has not come in yet,' said smiling Mrs. M'Culloch, into whose presence he was ushered ; 'but Nelly is in the back room, the drawing-room, I should say, and if you'll just go in and have a chat with her, I expect her papa every minute. He's not often late for his tea, and you young people are never at a loss, I'm sure, when you get together ; and, if you'll excuse me, I am busy with a little piece of work that I would like to finish with.'

Millie would much rather have sat where he was, but, being of a docile nature, he obeyed his hostess, and followed the smiling little maid into the drawing-room where Miss Nelly was sitting.

I suppose it is lawful for parents in every rank to look after the interests of their children, and why should Georgie M'Culloch be blamed, if his delay that night was not wholly undesigned ? 'Our Nelly' had taken a

fancy to the minister, 'her that treated all the lads in Lochtown as if they were dirt among her feet.' She had frequently said, 'she would not touch one of them with the tongs,' so when Cupid's dart had at last pierced her virgin heart, it was but right that her parents should do their best to assist the little god.

Poor Millie did not know that a snare was being laid for his feet ; his head was in the clouds, and his thoughts were far astray. He came in looking pale and wearied, indeed he was exhausted, though he did not know it, by the stormy moments through which he had been passing.

The girl looked at him curiously. 'He is looking ill, poor fellow ; he'll be much the better of some one to look after him,' she thought. Then she was very kind, and saw that he sat in the best arm-chair, the one with the Liberty cushions—'one of the tastiest things in Lochtown,' as its proud owner was assured—and having poked the fire, and arranged the pink shade of the standard lamp, her latest acquisition, to the best advantage, she prepared to make the most of her opportunity.

'That's a pretty thing, isn't it?' she remarked airily, lifting from the mantelshelf a photograph of a young lady, which she placed in Millie's hand.

'Very,' he said gently. 'Do I know the original ; there seems something familiar to me about it?'

'Well, that *is* good !' she said, smiling and beaming ;

'you are the first person that hasn't been completely taken in. I think it's best to begin by praising it, you see, and then they never guess it's meant for yours truly.'

'I beg pardon?' said Millie, on whom the young lady's quick voice and rapid gestures had a confusing effect.

'Yours truly, Helen M'Culloch. Now you must not go back from what you said. I think myself it's far too flattering, but my friends are bound to say "not at all."'

'It seems remarkably nice,' said the minister. 'Done by a Glasgow photographer, I see.'

'Yes, and I can tell you they cost a pretty penny; I'm half ruined already, and I don't believe I have one of them left.'

'Then,' said Millie, rising to what was evidently expected of him, 'I fear I must not ask if you can spare me one?'

'Let me see,' she said, 'do you know, I think you deserve one; I owe you something for that sweet book you sent me on my birthday.'

'Ah! yes,' going briskly to a drawer, and taking out a bundle of photographs. 'There's one here I might give you, perhaps, only you ministers are so dreadfully strict. But all my friends said it was a perfect sin to hide my neck, and I am sure it's quite correct; nothing for Mrs. Grundy to find fault with there, is there?'

Millie's soul shivered at the crudity of this young woman's ideas.

It was a pretty enough picture of a well-developed figure in evening dress, the shoulders by no means excessively exposed, and the bold, clever face looking out from above them, as if caught in something improper, and defying the world's censure.

'*Décolletée*, I suppose you might call it; but why shouldn't one be like other people, once in a way?' she said, looking into his face half doubtfully. 'So, if you'll not be shocked, Mr. Millie, you're very welcome to that young lady. Perhaps you had better not show it all over the place, though; Lochtown people are so funny.'

'Thank you,' he said gravely; 'but if I may choose, I prefer the one you showed me first. It is more homelike, is it not? More as one is accustomed to think of you?'

'Oh, well, if you put it that way? But I didn't know you ever thought about me, I am sure.' And she bridled and smiled more than ever.

'It is an exceedingly successful likeness,' replied the minister.

'Oh, you are too flattering. I don't think I ever look so nice as *that*. Give it to me for a moment, will you? There, that makes it complete!' and, to Millie's amusement, she returned it to him, bearing in true

actress style the name 'Nelly M'Culloch' in bold characters across it.

He observed how very bold and black was her caligraphy. Ah! how unlike that which was lying in the pocket next his heart. He was a fanciful young man, a dreamer of dreams; therefore he carefully placed the photograph in its thick pink envelope, in the other side of his coat. It should not be honoured by approaching too near. Meanwhile Miss M'Culloch had begun afresh,—

'By the way, Mr. Millie, there were some awfully nice things in that book you sent me. I wonder if you remember—a sweet thing about a pair that went out to walk in the woods, as far as I could understand—bits of it wouldn't parse, you know—but the love-making was jolly, and the girl seemed to help him out when he was bashful. Quite right too, I think; you gentlemen are so shy, don't you know. What *was* it called? Awfully pretty, I thought it.'

'“By the Fireside”?' suggested Millie.

'Yes, to be sure. How funny! Sounds quite appropriate for the present company, doesn't it?

'“We two stood there with never a third,” only we are sitting, and that's more comfortable to my mind. But I never was so fetched with any poetry before, as I was with some of yon. I had no idea Browning was so sensible!'

'Had you not?' said Millie. Oh, what profanity

might this dreadful girl be about to utter! The very Holy of Holies was not safe from her trampling feet. Just then—oh, welcome sound!—Geordie's creaking boots were heard in the passage.

'I hear your father,' he said, with a deep sigh of relief, which the undutiful daughter interpreted amiss.

'Father? Yes, he is always interrupting people like this, I hardly ever get a talk about anything that matters. Lochtown bodies are all he and mother care to hear about.'

'But I have business to talk over with him to-night,' said Millie, smiling at the near prospect of release; 'and I am afraid you'll despise us both, for it's nothing more intellectual than the arrangements for the social meeting.'

'Social meetings are rather apt to be slow, aren't they?' said Miss M'Culloch doubtfully, 'but no doubt father's up to the cookie part, and the number of bags that will be needed. Do you ever have recitations? I shouldn't mind giving a piece out of that book. We were well drilled in elocution in Glasgow, I can tell you. See now, what would you advise? I've a notion I could do our friend "The Fireside" very well, or there's a bonny thing about a gondola, nearly as good as some of Byron, "The Bee's Kiss and the Moth's Kiss," awfully bonny I thought it.

'To be sure, some of the old folk might think it not quite proper, that's to say if they understood what it

was ; but then if the minister approved, that would make it all right.'

Millie was positively cold with dismay. His had been indeed an unlucky gift. And Miss M'Culloch's smiling self-confidence gave every promise that she would carry her proposals into effect. In his mind's eye he saw the scene : the platform, himself in the chair, his elders, in their Sunday best, seated on either hand, the rows of his people staring at him from below, bags of buns and raisins crackling and rustling in their hands, oranges at thirsty lips, and this victorious young woman, flushed and triumphant in her evening dress, giving them 'In a Gondola,' under the sanction of his approval !

Something must happen to avert it. For once he must learn to say 'No.' He found himself shaking hands with Geordie in almost feverish gratitude to him for his appearance, and for the welcome summons to Mrs. M'Culloch's well-spread tea-table, covered with specimens of the best the bakery could produce.

As she, good woman, often said, 'It is real convenient to have the shop so handy. You never can be caught at unawares ; if it's only a mutton-pie for a friend's dinner, or a bit cookie, or a soda scone, ye need never be at a loss.'

CHAPTER XXVI

CAIRNDRUM

As has, I think, been already mentioned, Mrs. Archie MacLure was a very superior person. 'Alexandrina,' as she preferred to be called, not approving of *petits noms*, was not a person for whom they seemed appropriate. In a dress of crimson cashmere, heavily trimmed with plush, she was standing in the doorway to receive Mrs. Frederick and Jane on their arrival at Cairndrum. Over her shoulder appeared the beaming face of Aunt MacLure, which was somewhat over-clouded when the absence of Frank was perceived.

'A wise-like fellow he is,' she said, 'and as like Major Gourlay of the Volunteers as two peas, as I was just saying to Mrs. Archie, here. He'll be fine company for you and Jane, Mary, and I'm sure we're all sorry he could not come with you.'

'But he hopes to be here after lunch,' said Mrs. Frederick, in gentle apology. 'He was so sorry to have made another engagement; he will tell you so when he

appears,' turning to Mrs. Archie. 'And here comes Archie, and Emily too, and I'm wearying to see the bairns.'

Mrs. Archie was put out for a moment by the disarrangement of her programme. Like royalty, she had her plans prepared in advance, and of course needed a little time for readjustment.

At this stage Archie had been ordered to take Mr. Hay over the farm-buildings, allow him to smoke, and spend the time in such masculine pursuits as the inspection of horses, cattle, and prize pigs, till the luncheon-bell should ring, and the stranger's turn should come to sit on her right hand, and offer to carve the roast fowls. Archie might now be off duty. A moment's reflection showed that this was all the alteration needed in the order of proceedings. Therefore, accepting Aunt Mary's apology with kind indulgence, 'We married ladies,' as she comprehensively said, waving her hand towards her well-furnished drawing-room, 'may come in here and rest.'

Jane had been prepared to follow her mother docilely into the house, but found herself gently, but firmly, dismissed to the society of Emily.

'You girls will like to have your secrets in the garden, I daresay. Show your cousin the new dahlias, Emily; some of them, I am told, are particularly fine.'

'Dahlias be hanged,' said Emily irreverently, ignoring

that part of her sister-in-law's programme. 'What's up with the swell, Jane? Come and tell me all about him. Let me look at your hand—no ring yet, so I suppose you have not brought him up to the scratch. To be sure he has been away, Archie said, but he *must* come to the point, Jane; there's nothing—nothing,' and she spoke with emphasis, 'nothing more tiresome than having a man dangling about one, saying nothing decided one way or another.'

'Oh, Emily,' said Jane, laughing at her cousin's tragic air, 'you are an odd girl, though you think yourself so wise. How could a man say something decided the other way? Would you have him say "Emily MacLure, I have determined not to marry you." That would be rather rude would it not?'

'Well, some men say what almost amounts to that,' said Emily, with a rueful shrug. 'But you are not to go off on a side issue like that. We are talking of Jane, and we'll let Emily alone for the present. We all thought he was awfully "gone" on you that day on the steamer, John and all. Has he asked you to marry him? That's plain enough. Tell me the truth.'

'Who, John, do you mean?' asked Jane, blushing in spite of herself. 'Never; Archie did once, you know, but we won't tell that to Alexandrina.'

'John,' said Miss MacLure, with hearty contempt. 'Don't try to humbug me. But I see you have nothing

to tell me, so I won't tease you any longer, poor thing; you have not lost very much time yet, so I shan't give up hope.'

'You are very encouraging,' said Jane, who was in excellent spirits this morning; 'and now that the Catechism is over, mightn't we join Archie, I see him over there at the pig-sties—and little Jack in boy's clothes, I declare!'

'Yes, evidently Mrs. Archie does not think it proper for the sexes to mingle before meat. Jack was to be with his father and Mr. Hay had he come, while baby, in her best dress, was to be ready at 12.30 precisely, to be shown off to her grand-aunt in the drawing-room.'

'And if it had rained,' asked Jane meekly, 'what would have happened to us?'

'Had it rained we might have been allowed to join "the married ladies," and baby. But it has not rained. Mrs. Archie is no doubt pluming herself on the fact; for she knows she makes such excellent arrangements!'

Jack MacLure was a nice little boy, and Jane, like her mother, was fond of children, so she spent a pleasant hour with Archie and his son, Emily playing the part of a grumbling chorus at their heels, as they inspected the strong Galloway horses, the sleek cows, and the very ugly, valuable pigs in their different abodes. Archie retained a great kindness for his cousin Jane, and though quite loyal to the superior qualities of his

Alexandrina, who indeed managed him and his house admirably, thought there was something 'very taking' about the girl, as she stood with Jack's fat little hand in hers, watching with unfeigned interest the operation of the new thrashing machine, which was the most complete thing in the countryside. She also was delighted with the hens and the pigeons, and Jack begged his father to let 'Cousin' have a pair of the white fantails, 'for her own self.'

'Would you care for them, Jane; I am sure you are very welcome to as many as you like? Jack thinks everybody is the same as he is, daft about pigeons and rabbits.'

'He is a kind wee boy,' she said, kneeling down to hug the child, a favour he did not yet think himself bound to resent, 'and he'll come some day soon, and see all cousin's doos in their funny doo-cot. You'll bring him Archie, won't you, and let him have dinner with mother and me while you are at market?'

'And Auntie Emily,' said the child. 'Auntie Emily would like to come too,' and he slipped his disengaged hand in hers.

'Yes, Auntie Emily may come too,' Jane smilingly assured him. 'He takes after you, Archie, I think. You never liked anybody left out.'

So the whole party went amicably into the house at the call of the lunch-bell, or to be more exact, the

dressing-bell, for Mrs. Archie was one who looked well to the ways of her household, and set an example of tidiness to all.

It was annoying, no doubt, not to have a gentleman to sit at her right hand, and see her beautifully ordered table, but Mr. Hay's excuse was an excellent one, which she hoped to use with effect in future conversations.

'My aunt, Mrs. Frederick, lunched with us last week. Mr. Hay, her nephew, you know, was to have come with her, but at the last moment was prevented. He *had* to go to Culcreuch, his only chance of seeing his great friend John Hamilton, who was at home for a couple of days. However, he couldn't give us up altogether, and came to tea. Such an agreeable fellow he is,—but of course you have met him? No! Oh, we all like him *so* much. Of course he feels quite at home with us, from the family connection and all. I hope we shall see a great deal of him now that he has returned from India for good.'

Jane wished she did not feel so desperately sleepy, when the meal was over, and she and Emily were invited to sit in the drawing-room with their betters. Archie's ideas of his guests' appetites were on a liberal scale, and she certainly had eaten a great deal of that excellent mutton, and the creams and jellies that brought up the rear of the entertainment were only too tempting. Aunt MacLure's voice went on unceasingly. Mrs.

Archie, like a good daughter, listened with docility, while she knitted a sock for baby. Mrs. Frederick was similarly occupied. Even Emily had a piece of elaborate fancy work, only Jane was idle. She had looked over four photograph albums, and two illustrated books of Swiss and Italian views, had wished she could see baby, but had been told she and Jack were out walking, but would make their appearance with the tea-cups, and was now waging a war against yawns, which was fast becoming a losing battle, when 'Mr. Hay' was announced.

To be sure our fathers were right, and man is the lord of creation.

How everything grew lively at once that had been before so deadly dull! He must be introduced to Alexandrina, and welcomed by Aunt MacLure, and kiss his Aunt Mary, and be agreeable to Emily, and at last sit down by his cousin Jane, which duties he managed to perform in an expeditious and creditable manner.

'Did you see my husband anywhere about?' asked Mrs. Archie, in her best company voice. 'It is too bad of him not to have gone to meet you, Mr. Hay. He wished to send the trap down to the station for you, but my aunt thought you would prefer to walk.'

'Thanks, I enjoyed the walk,' said Frank. 'My aunt was right, as usual. I kept a look-out for MacLure as I came along, but did not see any one that seemed to

fit. I suppose he's busy at this time of the year. What a nice place you have here, quite the prettiest I have seen.'

'Oh, surely not so pretty as Culcreuch?' said Mrs. Archie, immensely pleased with Mr. Hay's approval. 'Everything must have looked lovely there to-day, I fancy.'

'It's too new and too grand for my taste,' said Frank. 'Everything looks as if it had been finished the week before last. The trees are so young too, and the iron railings all over the place, are suggestive of wet paint. But I daresay it's all very fine. However, I wasn't thinking of Culcreuch when I spoke. I am looking about for some nice place where I can set up my standard, and this takes my fancy immensely. You don't feel inclined to clear out though, I fear, even to oblige a stranger?'

'Oh, you are going to turn farmer are you?' said Aunt MacLure. 'Better ask Archie's opinion of the trade before you do that. It is nothing but grumble, grumble from January to December. A most unchristian occupation I tell him, that leads to nothing but complaining against the weather Providence sends him.'

'I am more modest in my ideas,' said Hay. 'I don't set up to be a farmer. I only wish a roof to cover me till my plans are arranged a bit.'

'Then you don't think of returning to India.

You'll be for taking a wife, and settling in Scotland, I suppose. Though I must say it seems a pity for a man to be idle, and still young, as you may say ; but no doubt you have made your fortune, and think it's time to enjoy yourself. All the young ladies will be setting their caps at you, I can tell you. But maybe you've made your choice already? I should not be surprised.'

Frank laughed. There was no use in being angry with Aunt MacLure. And she looked very comical, as she accompanied her home questions with meaning nods and winks.

'I don't know that I am particularly fond of idle men either,' he said. 'You'll have to set me to work, Mrs. MacLure ; and as for young ladies, they have left me severely alone, as yet. Why, at Culcreuch to-day they were all out after the pheasants. There was not one to say "good-bye" to, they were quite above looking at me. Caps, tweed caps, and kilts too, plenty of them, but they were not worn in my honour.'

'Poor Mr. Hay,' said Emily, not sorry to hear 'the Culcreuch swells' treated with irreverence, 'we mustn't chaff you, if you have been so ill treated already.'

'Lady Madeline and Lady Clementina are fine-looking girls,' said Mrs. Archie, with decision. She had no idea of hearing the magnates of the land run down by Emily MacLure. 'And the masculine style suits them very well, I must say ; they can carry off even a little

suspicion of fastness, as less aristocratic young ladies cannot do.'

'And how are you?' said Frank to Jane, under cover of the discussion which ensued.

'I am rather sleepy,' she answered in the same tone, 'I wish the children would come down. They are such nice wee tots, I think you'll like them. Oh, Frank, what have you been doing? Look at this.'

His tweed-clad arm was resting on the edge of her chair, and it was the sight of Emily's sharp eyes noticing its close proximity to her, that had made her look more closely at it. There was a great rent in the cloth.

'What, is there anything wrong? To be sure, I am a disgraceful sight.'

'Yes, Mr. Hay,' said Emily, 'I have been wondering what you have been fighting with? Did you meet Archie's big bull in the road, or did one of the masculine girls at Culcreuch tear your coat in play?'

'I am awfully ashamed,' he said; 'but I did not know there was any damage done. The truth is, I came in like a thief through the yard, (I have a weakness for short cuts), and there was a small boy standing watching a thrashing machine, and I stopped as well, and somehow the little beggar slipped, and in pulling him back I must have got my coat torn. I'm awfully sorry, but I hope you'll excuse me, I had no idea I was such a scarecrow.'

'And your good coat,' said Emily. 'He takes the damage like a hero, doesn't he, Jane? Fancy having a dress spoiled like that. I should swear, I know.'

'It is a very nice coat,' said Jane; and Frank saw there were tears in her eyes. 'But mightn't you have been hurt?'

'I suppose I might,' he said soberly, 'and so might the little boy.'

'Little boy,' repeated Emily, 'what little boy?'

'That one,' said Frank, 'and he looks none the worse does he?' as the door opened to discover Master Jack MacLure in a velvet suit, his hair in shining order, and his face immaculate, leading his tiny sister by the hand. 'I think he is cured of going too near the thrashing machine; an awful fright the poor little chap got. Tell your sister-in-law to be careful of him, though. He's too small to be let run about the place alone.'

Children take off the stiffness of a party, and even Mrs. Archie forgot her dignity, as she showed the charms of her daughter 'Florence Robina' to the guests.

Jane had Jack on her lap. She liked the little fellow; and somehow he was not less precious since Frank had been in danger for his sake.

Tea came in, and Archie, full of apologies for having been detained in an outlying part of the farm. He was a good-looking fellow, with his dark, sunburnt face and black hair and eyes, a trifle florid perhaps in his style of

dress—brown corduroy coat and riding-trousers, and the scarlet tie that gave value to his gipsy looks. Frank had a thoroughbred air beside him though, Jane noticed that, as he went round with cakes and scones, even his ragged sleeve was not obtrusive.

‘Oh, you young rascal!’ said Archie, seeking for his boy, and bestowing on him a most loving hug. ‘What’s this I hear about you from Sandy? Never go near the new machine again unless you are with dada. Where would you have been now, unless that kind gentleman had saved you? Upon my word, Hay,’ turning to Frank, ‘I don’t know how to thank you.’

‘It was rather a near shave,’ said Frank, ‘but I think Jack has got a lesson. My aunt might be frightened if she heard about it, and there’s no need to tell her. Shall I get you another cup, Jane? Mrs. MacLure’s tea is awfully seductive.’

‘Do you golf about here, MacLure? I noticed first-class links near the sea as I came along, surely.’

‘No, worse luck; I wish we could start a club. There might be an excellent course, if fellows had only public spirit enough to support it.’

‘There’s a field for your energies,’ said Emily. ‘Do you know, Archie, Mr. Hay thinks of settling hereabouts; and mother warns him against the trade of a farmer, but says he mustn’t be idle. He’d be a public benefactor if he laid out a course, in a dull hole like this. Keep

him up to it, Jane. I should, if I lived here, I know.'

'Well, it's a great game,' said Frank mildly; 'and professional golfers are often very clever fellows. I might do much worse than take to it seriously, only I fear I did not begin early enough.'

'Jack here would have a fine chance to make a player,' and he slipped into the seat beside Jane, and took the child's arm playfully to feel his muscles.

Jane was very quiet all this time. She felt tired, perhaps, because the room was hot, and Aunt MacLure's voice had wearied her. Jack's little head lay against her shoulder, the child was 'comfy' in the shelter of her arms. His father had crossed the room to speak to Mrs. Frederick, while Emily made love to 'Florence Robina.' Frank's hand touched hers as he spoke to the little boy. How happy it was to be once more together! So said his eyes as he went on with his little friendly chat. Was he not paler than usual? She put out her hand and touched the torn sleeve.

'See, Jack,' she whispered, 'what happened to poor Frank.'

'I'll kiss it and make it better,' and he laid his innocent lips upon it.

'Now you, cousin,' but cousin shook her head.

'Walk with me, Jane,' said Frank boldly, when the hour of departure came, and Mrs. Frederick was safely

packed into the carriage. 'Won't you? See what a sunset we shall have; you'll be ever so much the better for a walk.'

Jane paused irresolute, it sounded tempting. But the look on Emily's face was too much for her.

'No, thank you,' she said, 'I must look after mother; you had much better come with us. I don't feel up to five miles, I am afraid.'

'She's a lazy creature,' said Emily. 'Five miles used to be a mere stroll to her. I wish I could come instead, Mr. Hay; but then there would be the walk back alone. Archie and I will set you on your way, though, if you like.'

'That will be awfully good of you,' he said; 'perhaps Jane is tired,' as he stood leaning his hand upon the carriage door. 'May I come up in the evening? I've lots to tell you, if you care to hear. All right.' And Jane and her mother drove off alone.

Were those tears of disappointment that came into her eyes as she waved her hand to the group at the gate? Why had she cheated herself of that walk with him? Because Emily MacLure chose to make a mocking face. And she was longing to hear about Corby Hold! And he would think her careless and unkind!

CHAPTER XXVII

FOUR O'CLOCK

MEANWHILE Millie had gone, as he supposed, to keep a tryst with Jane. His heart almost misgave him as to the genuineness of the appeal. Could he have dreamed it all? And yet there was the note in Miss Frederick's pretty writing—'Harbourhead, To-morrow, 4 o'clock.'

He was early at the station and took his seat at once. Should he look out for her? No, better sit in a corner and take no notice should she appear. Evidently she wished that their meeting should be in private, else why appoint the Rocky Bay, and not her own house for its scene? The Rocky Bay; no doubt that was her meaning though she said Harbourhead. The young man's head was in a whirl of many thoughts, but he clung to the central one. She was in need of his help, and he was on his way to obey her and to give it.

It was a lovely, warm afternoon. The skies did not hang low and grey over the moors as on that former

day. They were blue, with little snowy clouds that moved softly from west to east. He looked neither to right nor left as he came out from the station, but took the upward path at once that led along the cliffs. Harbourhead was lying white below, but he would not believe she meant to meet him amid the bustle and small stir of the little port. No, he would hasten along to the lonely place where he had seen her that happy afternoon. He would be waiting on the heather, and if it pleased her she would come.

The sweet, soft breeze that swept over the moorland cooled and calmed his spirit. He walked as if on air. All pleasant hopeful things seemed likely to come to pass. Of course he reached the place of meeting far too soon; but that was only seemly. So he sat curbing his impatience, and looking now out over the blue shining waters, and then back to where the path issued from the fairy glen. He felt sure she would take that way, she would come down the ferny path beneath the beeches, the path that wound along by the side of the burn. He would catch sight of her first as she came stepping light, yet stately, like a queen across the soft close turf, leaving the shelter of the storm-beaten pollard elms that fringe the bay, and coming straight towards the shore. Then he would go to meet her, then she would give him her hand, then—but how the time begins to gallop now that passed at first so slow—four o'clock. But his watch

always gains; it is certainly fast. She will be here immediately. Stay, what is that?

A puff of smoke comes round the headland, the vibration of a screw is heard, the black hull of the steamer shoots into sight. This is the sight she always looks for, and to-day she is not here.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes! Harbourhead. She meant Harbourhead—she wrote Harbourhead—and he like a fool, like an oaf, like an idiot, presumed to misunderstand her. And perhaps she is waiting for him on the quay wondering why he has failed her? It is maddening to think of. He must rush off at once to put an end to his uncertainty.

He hastened, stumbling and slipping in a dangerous way along the giddy ledge, and down the rocky path that is the short cut to the harbour.

Harbourhead was presumably at tea—at least no one was to be seen, that even in the distance could bear the faintest resemblance to Miss Frederick, to eyes strained to catch sight of her. Then a thought struck him, fool that he had been not to think of it before! The manse, she might be there—of course she was there.

With fresh hope he turned to resume his search. His way led past the public bowling-green, where a little group was assembled. Bowls were a favourite pastime of a Saturday among the tradesfolk of the village and the summer visitors, though those by this date had

mostly taken flight. One or two female figures were discernible among the players, as Millie sped quickly past in the fast-falling twilight, full of the hope of finding her whom he sought at Mrs. MacDowall's fireside, beneath her kindly roof.

A laughing voice hailed him, loud, cheery, and familiar,—

‘Mr. Millie, I declare, flying by like a ghost. Where on earth did you spring from? Now do come and see me win this game for the honour of Lochtown.’

He must stop for a moment, out of common civility, and see Miss M'Culloch's triumphant finish, but something of his eagerness to be gone was to be read in his eyes. As he disappeared into the gathering shadows, Elizabeth Henderson (the young friend with whom Miss Nelly was presently going to have tea), said contemptuously. ‘Why, is that your great Mr. Millie? I can't say much for his manners, then; and he's not so uncommonly good-looking after all. Not half up to the U.P., at Kirk Ringan, to my mind. He's just a saulie, without a word to say for himself.’

‘Oh, he's shy,’ said Miss M'Culloch imperturbably. ‘See if I don't make him talk going home in the train. He can be awfully pleasant when he likes.’

She was not there. The first glance showed him that. But Mrs. MacDowall received him very kindly, all old ladies being fond of the Covenanter. Her husband

was out, gone on a round of parish visiting, but if Mr. Millie could put up with an old woman alone, they would have tea together. It would be 'canty' to have his company. So they sat by the fire, and though he told her nothing of his perplexity, he got comfort from her kindly ways.

'And have you seen Jane Frederick again?' she asked presently, reminded of the last visit he had paid her. 'That's a fine lassie, as Mr. MacDowall says, a fine, wholesome, good lassie as ever lived.'

'Yes,' said Millie, as if he were considering the question for the first time; 'I suppose you see her very often?'

'Not so often as I should like. You see she is her mother's only companion, and she cannot leave her to come running over to me. I half hoped she might have been here to-day. The summer trains will be stopping soon, I fear, and then it will be seldomer that she can come.'

'She is very bright,' said Millie; 'it is beautiful to see her with her mother, "a pair of friends," as Wordsworth says. She, Miss Frederick, kindly asked me to visit them, and I found Mrs. Frederick most charming—she reminded me of yourself, if you don't mind my saying so—I have been at the house twice. It is the prettiest room in Lochtown, don't you think? Though, to be sure, I am no great judge, perhaps. I have not seen

very many; our Lochtown great people don't throw open their doors to me.'

'Perhaps you have no great loss,' said Mrs. MacDowall in her caressing voice; 'but I am very glad Mary Frederick has taken you up. She is a woman among ten thousand, though I say it that shouldn't, if you think her like me.'

'A nephew of hers, a Mr. Hay from India, has been in Lochtown,' said Millie; 'do you know him, Mrs. MacDowall? He seems an agreeable sort of man.'

'Hay?—you don't say so?' she replied, beaming with animation; 'the very thing for Jane. Reggy Hay's son, I suppose. I was getting the most delightful account of him the other day from one of my cousins out there. A very good-looking man is he, well set up like all the Hays? And as good as can be, according to Edward Whichcote, and he used to be a judge of character.'

'I daresay he may be,' said poor Millie, striving after magnanimity. 'I have only met him once or twice with Miss Frederick, and he seemed very pleasant; but he went away as suddenly as he came to Lochtown, and I don't think he has yet returned.'

'Well, you have interested me very much, and given me something to think about. It would be the happiest thing for Jane Frederick to get a good husband, and I often build castles about her as I sit here by myself.

You'll think I am a silly old matchmaker, Mr. Millie, but indeed I love that lass.'

'I daresay you are not singular in that,' said Mr. Millie, as he rose to take his leave; and not till he was gone did the old lady perceive the significance of his words.

'Poor laddie, is that it?' she thought, 'and I like an old goose cracking up Reggy's son to his face. No wonder he seemed a little put out.'

Millie had found it hard to hear the praises of Frank Hay, and had left the manse with the half-formed idea of walking on, and joining the train at the next station on the line. But when he had left the manse and found himself under the stars, he looked at his watch and found it was almost train time. He was due in Lochtown early in the evening, and could not afford to miss it. Was there, after all, a hope that he might find *her* awaiting him on the platform, and have another delicious journey in her dear society? His heart leaped up at the very thought.

'Reggy Hay's son,' he had been scornfully telling himself. 'All women are alike, even the kindest; Mrs. MacDowall thinks well of a man she has never seen because she knew his father, who was killed in the Mutiny, and because his grandfather was a laird. How does that make him the husband for Jane? My father was ten times a nobler man, I daresay. And is love to

count for nothing? Those old ladies are childish. I will ask her to be my wife the first time we meet.'

So, glowing and fortified by his resolve, he jumped into a carriage, and sat down to wait until the train should start, or *she* should come. He kept a watchful eye on the wicket that opened from the road. At the first flutter of her garments he would be ready to spring down and humbly accost her, yet in his heart he knew she would not come.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOVE'S EVERYTHING

SHE did not come. How was she to be blamed, poor Jane, who was at that moment in her own house at Lochtown?

But some one else came, some one with a loud voice, and bright, dark eyes and rosy cheeks, who spied out Millie at once where he thought himself retired, and saying to her companions Lizzie Henderson and her brother, the schoolmaster, 'Yonder's the minister, I'll go with him,' came with a bustle of talk and farewells and greeting smiles, into the compartment where Millie sat.

Fortune favoured her, for though it was Saturday night and the train was full, no one came to disturb their solitude. Lochtown folk, seeing the two young people, may have thought it kind to leave them alone. She did not sit opposite to him. He was spared the destruction of that mental picture, which he carried with him, of a sweet, fair face, that, with the evening sky for a background, shone upon his darkness. Miss M'Culloch

was more practical. She took her seat beside him—very close to him indeed—he almost felt the weight of her handsome person as he sat in his corner. She smiled round upon him in an alarmingly tender fashion, she asked his opinion of a photograph of her friend Lizzie Henderson, which she had to hold very close to his eyes to let him see it.

She tried to make him tell her what he had done with 'yon beauty' she had bestowed on him the other night. 'I suppose you are like all the fellows, and have so many lady friends that you hardly know what to do with their photos? Mr. Henderson, that gentleman you saw just now, was plaguing me awfully to give him one, but I said "No, thank you," I don't make myself so cheap, I can tell you—and he swore he would frame it in silver, real silver, none of your oxydised stuff, if I'd only bestow one on him!'

'Did he indeed?' said Millie, amused, in spite of his woes, by the barefaced boldness of Miss Nelly, whose curiosity was no doubt an hereditary endowment; 'I fear I can't say I have done as much.'

At that moment he was guiltily conscious that Miss M'Culloch's picture, in its pink envelope, was lying nearer her than she supposed. He had forgotten its existence altogether since he placed it in his pocket on first receiving it!

'Have you thrown it away, then?' she asked

coquettishly, but with a hint of Geordie's dourness about the corners of her mouth; 'or perhaps stuck it into some old album, among all the dowdies of Lochtown, Miss Kennedy and Miss Frederick, and the rest of the old maids?'

'It is very safe, I can assure you,' said Millie coldly, wishing the young woman had more self-restraint.

'And how are your father and mother, well I hope?' he began again, in a friendly tone, though desperately nervous as to what Miss Nelly's next step might be. If she would only confine herself to remarks, but, as has been already hinted, Millie was but too well aware of the kindness with which female Lochtown was inclined to regard him.

'Father's all right; mother says she's seedy,' said Miss M'Culloch. 'But what does it matter what old people say, Mr. Millie? It's we young ones that ought to be considered. It's our day now, and our interests, and our prospects that are at stake. Oh, I'm sick of the old folk, and their pottering ways and ideas; I want a bold, free life, a sphere to display my talents in, a stage to act on. Oh, what lies I am telling, I want to live, and to love, and be happy. I am sure I could be happy with the man I love! Love's everything, isn't it still?'

Millie made no answer. There was a certain genuine ring about the girl's voice as she uttered the last words which interested him.

Perhaps he had wronged her, perhaps she was really unhappily attached. That might account for her flightiness.

‘Of course I know it is the correct thing to laugh at love and marriage and maternity nowadays,’ she resumed, ‘and to say that women are superior to men, and that it’s ridiculous to take vows to be faithful to one man all one’s days, but’ (with a magnanimous sacrifice to old-fashioned prejudice, to which the modest young man listened speechlessly), ‘I don’t hold with all that, I think a woman might be content with one man, if he was the man of her choice. I even begin to believe in the love the songs speak about—awful rot, I used to call it, and make fun of the sillies who were so easily gulled—but now,’ and she heaved a sigh, ‘when Lizzie was singing that sweet thing after tea to-night—

‘You and I together, love,
Never mind the weather, love—

why, I thought it hit me exactly! I declare it made me quite sentimental. Do you know it, Mr. Millie?’

‘I don’t think I do,’ he said. ‘But do you know, Miss Nelly, you must not speak on sacred subjects so glibly. A great deal of stuff appears in print that we are by no means all ready to accept, even though it may be thought the “correct thing,” as you call it. Besides——’

‘Ah,’ she interrupted him. ‘Sacred subjects!

There you go, you ministers ! Who was speaking of sacred subjects ? I was speaking of love. But you are too cold-hearted for a girl like me. You'd see a girl waste her heart in silence, and let her pour out her love and never even say "Thank you" for the gift. Oh, it's cruel, it's cruel.'

And with a sudden *coup de théâtre*, Miss Nelly dropped her head on Millie's shoulder, and lay panting there just as the train slowed and stopped, in the gas-lighted station of Dun-ard.

'This is intolerable,' said the young man between his teeth, with a fierce ejaculation of utter distaste. 'For shame's sake, get up and behave like a decent woman.' His eyes blazed with indignation, and even Nelly M'Culloch's spirit quailed. But her obedience was too late. The sight that met the ticket-collector's eyes, and brought a sly smile to his demure lips was sufficiently compromising. Her head still rested on the young man's unwilling shoulder, her cheeks were flushed, her mouth parted in agitation. He too was evidently excited as he sought his ticket.

'Sakes, the fellow had just been kissing her !' was the obvious conclusion. 'She'll hae a grand tocher, nae doot, and she's a bonny lass forbye. Let alane thae ministers where the lasses are, to pick oot aye the best, for a' they are sae hard on ither lads if they gang the least ajee.'

Millie felt wildly angry with the girl, with himself, who must surely be lacking in dignity to whom such an experience could arrive. A sort of blind fury possessed him. He could not trust himself to speak, he retreated to the farthest corner of the carriage and wrung his hands together, lest he should murder her who had dared to insult him. The girl was vexed at herself for having gone so far. She had felt a sudden impulse of what she called 'love' towards the young man, who was better looking and better bred than any other of her acquaintance. She had boasted of her power over him to Lizzie Henderson, and had enjoyed the badinage of the girl and her brother on the subject. An indefinable element of devilry, perhaps, lurked still in the wild Galloway blood of the M'Cullochs. She was half in passion, and half in fun. If they had not reached Dun-ard just at the wrong moment, who knows what might have happened? A kiss was no such great thing to make a fuss over. What harm would it have done to her or him?

She was afraid to speak to him. He looked so white and strange. Yet some sort of peace must be patched up between them before they reached Lochtown. The moments were flying in which something must be done.

'Mr. Millie,' she said timidly. But he remained silent.

Now her hot blood began to rise as the outskirts of the town were coming into sight, and still he made no sign.

‘Mr. Millie, I beg your pardon, and I hope you’ll shake hands and think no more of what’s happened.’

He had taken his umbrella as she spoke, and was rolling it up in a vainly-repeated attempt to make it neat. She noticed how his hands shook.

‘Lord, how nervous the man is!’ The bolder spirit of the girl despised him for being so easily moved.

‘Won’t you make friends, then?’ she said, with a laugh that was growing in assurance. ‘I can’t speak fairer than I’ve done.’

The train drew up at Lochtown. Still he said nothing.

She jumped out with a toss of her head, and waited for him to follow.

He lifted his hat, saying very quietly, ‘Good-night, I am sorry,’ and so disappeared into the darkness, leaving her on the platform.

‘Bless me, he’s a cross fellow,’ said the girl to herself, with an angry heart. ‘See if I don’t pay him out for this. Yet he looked awfully handsome when he was mad at me. I never admired him half so much before. He might have known I was partly in fun; but those fellows with their heads in the clouds never make allowances for people.’

'My gracious! I hope he won't say a word of this to father. That would spoil everything; and I have not given you up yet, Mr. Henry Millie, for all your superiority and the airs you give yourself. You'll be begging for that kiss yet, I promise you. See if you don't!'

Meanwhile Millie, thoroughly upset by all that had happened, had gone home to keep a necessary appointment. But, his dull duty done, he had time to consider all. His feeling of anger had died out. He was sorry for the girl, as he had told her, deeply sorry, and ashamed. How could a young girl be so horribly astray, a girl who had pious parents and a happy home? Was this the result of his endeavours to lay before his people all that was fair and lovely and of good report? It put rather a fool's cap on his labours, if the most highly educated of his hearers laid his teaching so to heart. 'Fool, that I am, to think that I had influence with them, that I could show the beauty of a life of high thought and culture. A vulgar girl making love to me in a railway carriage. Oh, it is sickening work!'

He would not think of Jane. It seemed profanation after what he had endured. He saw the book lying on his table which he had begun to read aloud to Mrs. Kennedy, and the wise thought struck him that, having finished his pipe, he would go and tranquillise

himself by an hour of the high, masterly thinking of another mind. That must be better than brooding here, if he were to be ready at all to face his people to-morrow.

'Come away, lad,' she said, as he went in and found her, as usual, alone by the fire. 'Anne is out at one of her teas for the Irish, a fine state of tiredness she'll come home in by and by, poor woman, bringing plenty of fleas with her if, by good luck, nothing worse. I'm just wearying for a screed more of the professor, and I see you've brought him in your hand. Oh, lad, you've no idea of the refreshment this kind thought of yours has been to me.'

'I'm awfully glad,' said the young man, encouraged by her gratitude. 'It is a comfort to be of use to somebody.'

'It's a cup of cold water you bring to me, and your Master will see to your reward, I do not doubt,' she said; 'but I must not keep you talking. I know your time's precious on a Saturday night.'

'We left off here,' he said, turning over the leaves, 'you remember the argument, I daresay, about the existence of the two Isaiahs?'

'Fine that.' So Millie read on for an hour and a half, while his troubles faded, and his courage was renewed to go forward to what might come.

'Thank you, lad,' said the old lady, as he rose to go.

'I often think we are not thankful enough to the Almighty that He made us with heads as well as hearts. Folks talk so much now about love and kindness and soft speech—let them keep their sugar to themselves—but is it not a grand thing that we can be made happy, as you and I have been this hour, just by using the heads we have on our shoulders? My heart is whiles heavy enough, and I am cross and cankered to Anne, poor body, that wishes me nothing but good, and would have more show of pawing and petting. But my head, my head, is the better part of me, at least, and I cannot but be glad it was so ordered.'

'I daresay you are right,' said Millie amused. 'I never thought of comparing the rival claims. But aren't the poets against you, Mrs. Kennedy? They are always cracking up the heart, you know.'

'The poets—a wheen trash!' she replied stoutly. 'Holy Scripture is on my side of the controversy. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Where will you find anything to match that against the head? No, no, the natural heart is vile; and 'deed, I am not very sore taken up with the renewed heart either, so far as it has come under my observation. Fill you your head well, young man, that's my advice, and you'll not have time to waste, feeling what your heart's doing.'

'Oh, come, you are contravening Scripture now,

Mrs. Kennedy. "Keep your heart with all diligence." What do you make of that ?'

'Well, do your best,' she said kindly, 'do your best. Keep it if you can, or make a present of it, as I doubt you'll be doing some day, wisely or not, but never forsake your head ; for I think ye'll find out the more, the longer ye live, that it's the best member ye have, and the best friend to lippen to.'

And when he returned to his home, as he presently did, he felt himself much strengthened by the old lady's calming advice. And he had need of all his self-command, for in the letter-box he found another strange little billet which ran as follows :—

'Forgive me ; Monday, Old Mill, 12 o'clock.'

Was some mischievous imp playing a trick, or what caprice of fate had thus interfered between him and his lady ? It was not like the straightforward nobleness of her nature to tantalise him thus. Yet he would not blame her, he might surely trust her to know best.

He put the letter with the other into his pocket, and as he did so, remembered the photograph which he carried about him. With an angry impulse of contempt he was going to throw it into the fire, but—'No, that is giving it too much importance,' he thought, and tossed it instead on to the side-table where his papers lay.

There was a remainder of boyishness in the Covenantant, for all his wisdom and the troubles he went through.

CHAPTER XXIX

'I WANT JANE'

FRANK HAY when he parted from the MacLures walked soberly, and rather sadly, towards Lochtown. He had hoped for this time alone with his cousin, he wished to tell her all that was in his heart about his future plans.

Since his return from London was it only fancy or had she begun to hold rather aloof from him? His aunt was as kind and affectionate as ever, but Jane? Was it possible that after all she believed in Lady Millicent's vile hints about that wretched little Lilla, and that, half unconsciously, she was withdrawing from his nearer friendship?

'I have offered them no proofs that I am not a blackguard,' he had to own, 'and yet my aunt believes me. Perhaps I am a fool to imagine that Jane might do as much. I almost wish it were that.' For if I told her the whole story, she would surely see I was not lying. Why would she not come with me now? So fond of long walks, and yet she won't walk with me. I

daresay I am not an awfully amusing companion, still—she walked with that fellow Millie on a wet, disagreeable day. How the rain poured, I remember, and I, like a fool, thinking of her at the fire missing me, and she, with her bright face, talking poetry with the minister. She smiles so sweetly on every one. Ah! that's the mischief. I felt half jealous of MacLure this afternoon; perhaps she cares no more for one than another. It is such an innocent face, too, such a face to make one happy, and I believe she might be happy with me—if only I am in time. Good heavens! what do I know of her heart?

'That chap has a sort of fascinating way with him. He has been here beside her so long, what reason have I to suppose she was waiting for me to appear? She likes me because I am her cousin, and so are the MacLures. And all the time perhaps this fellow, with his poetry and his blue face, is the one she really likes best. What a nuisance she must think me, if that's so; and with all my prating talk about Corby Hold and Craig Hay, as if it mattered to her where I chose to live. She surely knows that, unless she'll have me, I may as well go back to India again.

'Though I'd like to have the old place, and it would please my aunt to have the old name revived, but, unless Jane is to be the mistress, I can't say I care about it awfully one way or another. They must understand

that I'm not such a fool as to wish to settle here alone, to watch my cousin making that fellow happy ! But women are so strange ; one never knows what they may think. Why would she not walk with me ? This arm of mine's aching badly. I expect it will be a handsome spectacle to-morrow.

' Poor wee beggar ! I ought to be obliged to him, though. How gently she said it ! " Poor Frank," and stroked my coat.'

He smiled to himself as he remembered the little boy's innocent words, ' Kiss it to make it well.'

And as he stood on the high road in the autumn dusk, any one might have thought him ' daft,' had they seen how tenderly this middle-aged man looked at his poor ill-used sleeve.

' I can but ask her,' he thought, with renewed cheerfulness, as he remembered the kind hand that had touched it last. ' To be sure I have never told her what I think of her ; only I supposed she would know. And when shall I have a chance again ? Aunt Mary can't be sent to bed on purpose to please me.'

' Well, Frank, had you a pleasant walk ?' asked his aunt, looking up from her knitting, as he entered the drawing-room that evening.

His eye went quickly round the room as he answered, ' Oh yes ; the road was new to me, and I always feel

the better of a walk. But where is Jane—not gone out I hope ; she seemed tired, didn't she ?'

'I don't think she was tired,' said his aunt ; 'but she has a foolish notion that I catch cold whenever she lets me out of her sight. Though I tell her I am old enough to be trusted alone, she's always thinking of her stupid old mother. She'll be here directly ; sit you down, and give me some of your news till she comes. I like you in those clothes, laddie. Who is it that says evening dress is the most becoming a gentleman can wear ?'

'I'm glad to hear it,' said Frank, not ill pleased that his aunt should admire him ; 'but I don't remember, if I ever knew, who made such a wise remark.' He was reminded of the days when his mother had been in the habit of dispensing the like fond flattery. From the single pearl stud in his shirt to the silk sock which just appeared above his neat ankle, he was exceedingly well turned out, and I suppose he was not unaware of the fact.

But still Jane delayed. 'I want Jane,' he said, rising and thrusting his hands into his pockets, as he stood kicking a piece of coal to the detriment of his patent leather shoe. He spoke half in joke, half in the commanding way his aunt enjoyed.

'Oh, Aunt Mary!' turning round to face her as he spoke, 'that's what I want always, that's just where it is,

I want Jane. But perhaps she doesn't want me. Does she want me ; would she have me, do you think ?'

' My dear,' said Mrs. Frederick, with a little gasp, ' you should ask her ; she couldn't please me more. Ah, I hear her coming ; she has been looking for something upstairs.'

In she came ; and, if you please, she also had put herself into festive array. It was only a black lace dress that she wore, with a bunch of bright single dahlias—orange, purple, and flaming scarlet—stuck in her bosom ; but she looked a graceful figure as she came in, with a swift glance round the room that changed into a smile, as it lighted on Frank by the hearth.

He came forward quickly to relieve her of her burden, some old albums and scrap-books for which she had been seeking.

' They were terribly dusty,' she said ruefully, ' no wonder I have been so long. I thought that my fingers would never be clean again ; it quite reminded me of Lady Macbeth.'

' This little hand,' said Frank, boldly taking it and looking at it critically ; ' you have nice hands, Jane ; but why don't you wear rings ? I rather like it, I think ; one sees so many in India, and some most awful rubbish, you know.'

' Perhaps I have none to wear,' said Jane.

'Oh, my dear,' began Mrs. Frederick.

'Yes, love, it's not your fault that I have none ; do you think I don't know that you would give me all you have ? Why, don't I, Frank ? Invent some other reason for me. I had one when I was a small child, and I cried so when I lost it that it has never seemed worth while to run the risk of such desolation again. You don't wear very many yourself, do you ?'

'No ; but beauty should go beautifully. I'd like to see you in diamonds, Jane.'

'Thank you !' she answered pertly ; 'and I thought I was looking so nice in my best party dress. I put it on on purpose to let you down gently from your swells at Culcreuch. But there are some people whom it is impossible to please.'

'And who are they ?' he blandly asked. 'So you hurried home to dress up, and wouldn't have a word to say to me. Was that why you snubbed me so badly, Jane ?'

'I daresay it was,' said Jane. 'Dress was ever a snare to me ; and perhaps your lordship is none the worse of being sometimes kept down.'

'Have you found what you wish, mother ? It is a picture of Craig Hay, isn't it, with you and your brothers playing about in the foreground. Let us each take a book and see who can find it first.'

'Ah, here it is !' said Mrs. Frederick. 'Come and

look at this, Frank.' And while he leaned over her chair, she explained to him the quaint little drawing. ' Our governess did it, and I remember we all thought it so beautiful.'

Craig Hay, in finest pencil work, was seen in the background, while on the grass in front was a child's carriage. ' The little girl sitting in the coach is myself, you know. Johnny is standing behind, the big boy with his rabbit in his arms ; and that is your father Reggy, standing beside me with his toy-horse ; and Frank (that you all laugh at, and Jane says would like to manage me still) is the nice little laddie that's going to pull me along. What a grand frock that was that Reggy is wearing ; Miss Howden invented it, you know, and we thought it lovely—blue velvet with a scarlet sash ! But my mother was not altogether pleased when she saw the painting. She said to Miss Howden that she was " not very fond of bright colours for children." I remember, as if it were yesterday, the tone of her voice as she said, " Please let Mary be rather more plainly attired." So a white frock and a blue sash was all I got instead of the pink and emerald green Miss Howden had promised me.'

' And a great deal prettier you look, aunt,' said Frank. ' My poor little father is rather a guy, you must allow. But you are all a bit wooden, aren't you ? The chaps in frills and pantaloons fetch me the most,

Uncle Frank shows promise of his present proportions !'

'He was always fat,' Mrs. Frederick allowed, 'but a good, kind, little boy. You young people don't appreciate him half enough.'

'Perhaps we don't; but tell us now about the rooms in Craig Hay. Do you know, aunt, I am like Jane there. I fear I am a snob. I am the least bit disappointed in the look of Craig Hay. I think I imagined it a grander abode. Is it possible that Lady Millicent is right, and that she did not marry into the most august family in Scotland?'

'I don't know what you call "august,"' said his aunt, for the first, and let us hope for the last, time nettled by her beloved nephew, 'the Hays are an excellent family, an ancient and honourable house; and Craig Hay was never thought too small by those it belonged to.'

'That's right, aunt, stick up for your family,' said Frank delighted. 'All the better for me that it is not a second Chatsworth. I don't know why I should have fancied it all over fountains and balustrades. And it looks awfully cosy and bonny, even in that pencil drawing. I am sure it will be ten times better when we get there.'

'It's the sweetest spot in all the countryside,' said Mrs. Frederick, quickly appeased. 'We were never dukes, to be spending our money on waterworks and

landscape gardening ; but Hay of Craig Hay is a name no one need despise.'

'I am not despising it,' said Frank soberly ; 'I should be only too thankful to have a right to it. If you had knocked about as much as I have, you'd know a man gets tired of living out of his own country and continually changing his place. Don't you believe me, Jane ?' and he turned sharply on his cousin, who was sitting with an album on her lap idly turning its leaves.

'I believe you think so,' she said, thus appealed to, 'but I was remembering something Mr. Millie said the other day. He and I were agreeing that one often longs for change. Think of him eating out his heart in that narrow life of his, with all sorts of feelings and hopes that never find scope or outlet. It seems odd to hear you complain of too many changes, and too much wandering, when we get so little. Yet he is as able to enjoy as others ; and why should he never have a chance of satisfaction ?'

Jane looked eager and interested. Her colour rose, her voice even trembled a little, she was ever ready to champion the oppressed.

'What sort of feelings and hopes does he talk about ?' asked Frank, coming back to his seat. 'I suppose I am no judge of such things ; yet I fancy at bottom all men's feelings are much the same. It doesn't seem to matter particularly where you live, does

it? You can have feelings anywhere ; they are not the peculiar property of Mr. Millie, are they? I beg your pardon, Jane ; I don't know why I should get cross about it. It must be hard on a chap like that never to go about and see the world a bit. Only——'

'Only what?' asked Jane.

'Only I am an ill-tempered brute ; you must not mind what I say.'

'And I don't mind,' said Jane placidly, 'you may say what you please. And now, if mother has forgiven you for speaking lightly of Craig Hay'—('Which I never did ; I only said it was not quite so grand as I had imagined')—'you may tell us what Lord Culcreuch said about Corby Hold.'

'A poor, little, damp dungeon of a place,' said Mrs. Frederick eagerly ; 'I wish you joy of it, Frank, if you turn up your nose at Craig Hay, "the most comfortable house in Galloway," as my father often said.'

'Corby Hold,' said Frank, smiling at the remembrance. 'He's a somewhat simple old boy, the Earl. He was delighted at the idea of having me for a tenant,—"nothing could be better—rent—don't speak of it, my dear boy, whatever you like, just enough for a qualification—we'll have the General Election on us in a twelvemonth. Every good citizen's duty to take part in public affairs ; country in danger. Jack, speak to Caruthers (that's the agent, you know), and have the matter

settled at once." This was all very fine, but when we came to details, they weren't altogether savoury. It seems my aunt is right, as she always is, and the tenant of Corby Hold would run a very good chance of dying of typhoid, in a couple of weeks, unless the whole place were thoroughly overhauled, and a lot of money spent on it, more than either his lordship or I seemed inclined for. Our enthusiasm rather died out after that, for although I have no objection to save my country, I'd rather do it in a more cleanly way than by dying of bad drains, even with the chance of voting for Lord Hamilton with my latest breath ! So we mutually cooled off, and I am adrift again.'

'The worthy old Earl,' said Jane ; 'it was a chance not to be thrown away, of securing a safe vote for his son. But I suppose he hasn't a great deal of ready money to lay out on repairs.'

'Not if he has to pay for many dresses such as his daughters wore last night,' said Frank, noticing how prettily Jane's white arms shone out from their black surroundings.

'Were they so very splendid ?'

'They seemed so to me, gorgeous—red and blue velvet, with jewels of sorts, far too grand, you know ; and they were "no very bonny" after all, as I am sure my old nurse would have said, had she seen them. But then I am not very fond of young ladies who smoke,

and beat me at billiards, and clap me on the back with their cues, and say very naughty words when anything puts them out. When it came to brandy and sodas, upon my word, I thought I had enough of it, and went off to bed. I don't think Jack Hamilton half cares about the way the polite world seems to live nowadays. He and the old people are quite "out of it" at Culcreuch.'

CHAPTER XXX

SHOW SUNDAY

WAS there a much happier woman in Lochtown than Mrs. Frederick as she walked to church next morning? Leaning on her nephew's arm, with Jane on her other side, her cup of satisfaction was full. Remember, this was the first time she had had an opportunity of appearing with him in public. It was Show Sunday in her heart. Her brother came to see her at very long intervals; but a Sunday in Lochtown was a thing he especially shunned. No relation of her own had been seen with her in church in the memory of man.

'I must sing in the choir,' Jane warned the party as they paced leisurely along, her swift step curbed for once to suit her mother's; 'but you and mamma will present a sufficiently noble appearance without me. I shall be able to enjoy the sight to my heart's content from the choir seat.'

In his frock coat and London hat Frank looked quite imposing; and a good many eyes were turned upon

Mrs. Frederick and the stranger as they came into church. Lochtown people, however, do their staring in characteristic fashion. They will not allow the outsider the pleasure of thinking he has excited their admiration. Not at all. It is their unfavourable regard that one feels one has obtained, and that only because one's personality is obtrusive.

'Whatna like man is yon, auld Mrs. Frederick's gotten wi' her the day; some outlandish body wi' a floo'er in his breast as if he were gaun to a mairriage rather than to the kirk?' said one gossip to another.

'Ho, he'll be a lad for Jane, may be, but I doot she'll no be muckle made up wi' him. There's something gey warldly like about the wey his heid's brushed. I wish he mayna turn oot a bad bargain for a' his braw claes.'

'Braw, dae ye ca' yon man "braw"? Deed I thocht the body had forgotten to pit on a neckcloth a'thegither. And then I saw it was a bit white rag he had on, ane o' thae made-up trash ye'll get for sixpence in the High Street.'

'Well, well, she's a kind auld cratur to the poor, but I wish her joy o' her guid-son, if he *is* a guid-son, that she's getting after a'.'

They were not consciously ill-natured, these good ladies of Lochtown. They only judged people by the

Lochtown standard, and of that we others must make up our minds to come short.

Jane was quite content with her cousin's look as he stood up so tall and reverent to join in the singing of the opening psalm. She thought she had never seen a figure that pleased her better, and fancied she recognised his voice, through the loud and not very harmonious music that filled the church. His hair was turning grey as he often owned. Yet he had almost a youthful look, as he stood straight and alone, at the side of his little widowed aunt, and his shoulders were square and manly. Oh, he was a cousin of whom any rational being might be proud !

Frank, on his part, screwed his glass into his eye ; and away there upon the platform, beneath the pulpit, among some dozen or so Lochtown lads and lasses, he saw the sweet pleasant face of her he had learned to love. His heart was full of hope and praise and reverent content. How full of meaning seemed this Scottish version of the Psalms :—

O' thou my soul, bless God the Lord,
And all that in me is
Be stirred up His holy name
To magnify and bless.
Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God,
And not forgetful be
Of all His gracious benefits
He hath bestowed on thee.

So many gracious benefits already! Did he not owe a lifetime of thanks and praise? And yet he sought another :—

Who thee with loving-kindness doth
And tender mercies crown.

He sat down feeling very humble. Why should he, so unworthy, expect to have his life crowned with happiness and joy? Better men had to do without. Yet if the crowning gift were given, it should be his to show his thankfulness so long as he lived.

So the service proceeded; and I must own that neither Jane nor her cousin, had they been interrogated at the end, could have given a good account of what Mr. Ferguson had preached to them. Mrs. Frederick, who was better than most people, had a gentle way of supplementing, from her own well-stored memory, the deficiencies in her minister's discourses. She could have told you gladly what she had heard, or fancied, but to ordinary beings like Jane, and Frank Hay, the good man's eloquence had rather an elusive quality.

And their thoughts were preoccupied that morning, were they not? Forgive them if they dreamed when they should have tried to listen. You cannot have perfection in every member of a family!

Jane joined the others at the porch, looking her best in her Sunday clothes, and wearing a Sunday face. There must have been some elevation in her wandering

thoughts, to leave that gentle graciousness of expression. It seemed to Frank that never had she looked so desirable.

‘Won’t you take Frank this afternoon to hear our friend Mr. Millie?’ asked Mrs. Frederick (an innocent match-maker, anxious to give her nephew an opportunity to speak). ‘I have taken a great fancy to that young man, and I am sure it would please him to see you there.’

‘Isn’t she an aristocrat?’ asked Jane, blushing involuntarily, as she had a habit of doing whenever Mr. Millie was named. ‘She still thinks from the patron’s point of view. I don’t suppose it matters so very much to a minister who hears him. At least one hopes not.’

‘I’ll go anywhere you like to take me,’ said Frank. ‘I’ll stay at home if you prefer it. I only stipulate that I am not to be sent off, to spend Sunday alone at the George. Would your mother disapprove of a walk?’ he said half aside, for he thought if he had Jane alone on the moors, he could tell his story with better success.

‘I am afraid it might vex her,’ she replied in the same undertone.

‘Yes, mother, I’ll try to make a Covenanter of him. It would never do to leave that part of his education incomplete.’ Therefore it came to pass that when Millie entered his pulpit that afternoon the first face he saw was the one he most longed to see.

Jane was sitting in the same pew as on that other Sabbath, that seemed so long ago, when the first thought of her had lodged in his heart. She was bending a little forward, with her sweet serious face, her hand upon the Psalm-book ready to find the place. Hay was beside her,—that he noticed afterwards, but the first glance saw Jane alone.

Could he go on with the routine of the service when he was filled with such a longing to go down, and gaze into her eyes, and hear from her own lips the mystery explained? Blessed are the bonds of habit that restrain us against our will, and now made it possible for the young man to do his present duty. He did not look her way again,—he dared not if he were to command his spirit.

Jane found the Psalm, which the low plangent voice was reading from the pulpit, and together Frank and she looked on the sacred page. She kept her eyes upon the book, but there was a thrill in Millie's tone which told its own tale to her. He had seen them, she knew, for indeed they were not a pair to be easily overlooked. 'I wish—I wish I had never seen his face!' She was honest with herself; she owned the spell that voice had cast upon her. Was she, therefore, faithless? Nay, was she not rather obedient to a stronger voice than his? Was it not Love that had drawn nearer yet than fancy or poetic thought? Was it not Love that had laid his hand upon her, and bid her leave her dreams?

Frank turned the leaf, and his face towards her as he did so with that look of peculiar innocence and gentleness, that short-sighted people wear when their glasses are discarded for the nonce. Could heart of woman wish a dearer friend?

I cannot tell you how Millie preached that afternoon. To himself, the time seemed to pass in a sad wrestle against the wish to throw away his paper, to gaze his fill on Jane, to be done with exhorting his kind admiring flock, with speaking platitudes and telling childish tales.

Yet to Jane it seemed as if she were listening to a man inspired. He was so utterly different from good Mr. Ferguson, to whom there were no extremes, no sunny heights nor any depths of ill. All Millie said was living, the agitation of his mind made it impossible that his words should bear no message. He thought he had utterly failed, but there was a pathos in his tone that carried his preaching home. What were these words with which he was finishing his short discourse?—

This life is but the passage of a day,
This life is but a pang and all is over,
But in the life to come, which fades not away,
Every love shall abide and every lover.
Be the road short, and be the gate near,
Shall a short road tire, a strait gate appal?
The loves that meet in Paradise shall cast out fear,
And Paradise hath room for you and me and all.

Jane gave a sigh as the quaint pathetic lines were

ended and the speaker closed his Bible. She had been rapt into that world of dreams in which Millie's detractors said he was too apt to lead his flock meandering.

'Well,' she said to Frank, as they walked down the street, 'how did you like it?'

'To tell the truth,' he said humbly, 'you will think it awfully stupid of me, I was disgusted with myself, but, do you know, I was sleeping nearly all the sermon. I know you can't help despising me, but we had just finished lunch, and I don't suppose I slept very much last night—my arm was aching a bit. But I am really awfully ashamed,—was it a splendid sermon?'

'I think so,' said Jane, blushing in that absurd way of hers. 'But your arm, Frank, I am so sorry. I did not know it was so bad. Ought you not to show it to Dr. Foster? No wonder you felt sleepy.'

'Oh, it's mending,' he said. 'I got something from the doctor last night, bruises are best looked to at once. But about that chap. Is he very eloquent? Tell me what he said.'

'I never could report any one—no, you must hear him yourself to understand the charm—the kind of glow,' she said, hesitating for a word. 'It is just himself, it won't bear translating into my dialect.'

'I suppose I should not have made much of it then,' said Frank. 'Has my aunt ever been to hear him, or

does she recommend him only on hearsay? Those transcendental fellows are rather above the heads of the crowd, aren't they?'

'He's not transcendental,' said Jane simply, 'he's very good.'

Frank said no more. He was conscious of feeling sulky, and his arm pained him a good deal. The distance was so short to his aunt's house,—and the precious moments had been wasted in discussing Millie.

'Poor Frank,' said Jane gently, as they reached the safe shelter of her home; 'and I never knew your arm was aching so.' She touched the sleeve of his coat shyly as she spoke. 'It is horrible to think of that machine,' and she gave a little shuddering sigh.

'Jane,' he began eagerly; but she had the key in the lock of the door and her face was turned away.

'Mother will be ready for tea,' she said, 'and you too.' That was not the time to tell her.

Frank was not accustomed to contradiction. An only son, unless he had naturally been of a gentle temper, he might by this time, surrounded for so long by Indian servants, have developed into a tyrant. He was not that, nor was he a bully; still, it must be confessed, he liked his own way and expected to have it. He found it difficult to submit gracefully to sitting in his aunt's drawing-room, listening to her gentle chat, hearing her questions about the sermon which he had not heard,

and Jane's answers. She was unnecessarily enthusiastic, was she not, rather in what she implied than in what she narrated. It seemed as if Millie's words were considered something too sacred to be lightly repeated. And that was really going a little too far.

So the conversation languished in a way that was unusual. Jane felt the constraint that had come into the atmosphere. What was wrong? Was Frank angry with her? Was it possible that the dear divinity was even a little cross?

Strangely enough this did not give her so much annoyance as it certainly ought. Her spirits rose as his seemed to fall. What woman can help being pleased when she sees her power to provoke jealousy in the man who, after all, has all her heart? It is so funny to watch him making himself unhappy over so inadequate a matter. One, too, that it is so ridiculously easy to set right. Jane therefore laughed and was cheerful, and, I fear, was not alive to the naughtiness of her cousin's gloomy face.

At last he rose to go. He almost felt grateful to Aunt Mary for her persistence, in preventing a *tête-à-tête*, which at first he had been disposed to consider ill-judged. In Jane's present mood he did not think it would be very hopeful work to speak to her. She seemed to have her head turned with admiration for the minister. Of course it was always said that women loved

priests, and the fellow had a sort of sacerdotal look that some people might find attractive. 'I may as well go,' he said plaintively, 'the George people will think I have disappeared for good.'

'Shall we not see you in the evening?' said his aunt, mentally resolving to efface herself when that time should come.

'Yes, do come, Frank,' chimed in Jane cheerfully. 'Mother and I get so stupid on Sunday night.'

'And am I so brilliant, I shall keep you alive?' he answered, with a perceptible lightening in his tone, for he was easily appeased, and could not long be angry with Jane. 'Read me some poetry when I come, and I'll do my best to understand it—and not to fall asleep.'

'You may sleep if you like,' she said, 'I shan't be offended.'

CHAPTER XXXI

THE IDEAL CHAIRMAN

BUT whether the close atmosphere of the Covenanting Kirk had been more to blame for Frank's sleepiness than he and Jane supposed, certain it is, that no sooner had he left the house than the great lady herself began to suffer from such a violent headache, that there was nothing for it but to succumb, and retire ingloriously to bed where, in a darkened chamber, and with severe pain shooting through her head, she had time to consider, if she chose, the unkindness with which she had treated her cousin.

She had meant to be so nice to him in the evening, but alas ! that could not be. 'Tell him, mother, my head is really bad,' she was forced humbly to entreat ; 'don't let him think it is only pretence.'

'Frank is not so foolish,' said his fond Aunt Mary. But Jane, though she said nothing more, was not quite reassured.

Whether his aunt succeeded in convincing him of

the genuineness of Jane's malady or not, it must be owned that our hero was in a restless mood. His curiosity was roused about that minister. Had he some secret influence that ordinary preachers did not possess? He felt himself drawn to that place in the Baker's Wynd, where he had gone to meet Jane and Miss Kennedy. He would go to hear for himself. It would please her perhaps. At least he would know better what to think, after hearing the sort of thing that so impressed and delighted her.

So he threw away his cigar and went softly into the crowded bare room, taking a seat near the door, the first that he could find vacant.

Millie saw him at once though he came in so quietly. He hesitated for a word, then recovered himself, and went on with what he was saying. Frank was listening with jealous ears, but his was a candid spirit. He felt ashamed of his own littleness and ill-will. Was it not far better that Christ's Gospel should be rightly set forth, than that he, Frank Hay, should find his rival a mere wind-bag? His gentle nature triumphed. The fellow was a born preacher; he was a worthy message-bearer for God. He bent his head in honest prayer, that a blessing might come to all who heard him. There was a certain noble simpleness about Hay which is not too common amongst men; he owned the gift which Millie had. He was not sorry he had come to the meeting even

though what he heard had not removed his fears,—in his magnanimity he even waited for the speaker at the end, and thanked him for his address.

‘You are very kind,’ said Millie, to whom the praise of this courteous stranger would naturally have been sweet. He felt as if he ought to hold himself aloof from one, who for aught he could tell, might be causing Miss Frederick distress. He knew not what to think.

But it was not easy for any one to feel the grip of Frank Hay’s hand,—to hear his voice and to look into his face, and still retain suspicions of him.

‘One may smile and smile and be a villain,’ we are told. Yet, if a man is honest and well-meaning, and tries to live a Christian life, there are apt, thank Heaven, to be traces of it in his face, and these Henry Millie could not but perceive.

‘You must be done out, I should think,’ said Hay ; ‘that room is hot enough even to hear in, and speaking in it must be far worse.’

‘Have a cigar?’ and he handed Millie his case, taking his arm as he spoke, in friendly fashion, as they emerged together into the quiet street. ‘Won’t you come back with me—to the George, I mean? I have been hoping you would look me up ever since I got back, but I suppose you parsons are kept awfully busy?’

‘I did not know you had returned,’ said Millie shyly. He was trying not to like this well-dressed cousin of Jane’s.

'Oh yes, I got back some days' ago. I was in your church this afternoon. What a comfortable place it is too. You live near it, I believe?'

'Not far off,' said Millie; 'in fact this is my way home,' stopping as they came to the corner of a street. 'Will you not come with me? I shall be glad if you will.'

'Better than the George on Sunday evening, you think; I daresay you're right,' said Hay good-humouredly. 'Up this way is it—if you're sure I shan't bother any one?'

Each of the men was curious to know the other's thoughts—a mutual attraction of interest drew them together.

'I live alone at present,' said Millie, as he held back the door to let his guest enter the manse; 'so if you'll excuse bachelor ways, I'll have supper brought into the study. Right forward, I'll be after you in a minute.'

The study looked snug enough as Hay went in, a bright fire danced in the grate sending up flickering lights, which showed the well-clothed walls.

'Plenty of books,' he observed; 'and not all theological either.'

His eyes turned next to the mantelpiece, above which hung a pipe rack. Beneath were framed photographs, evidently of the minister's father and mother; his a fine

face, sad and wistful, hers of a more commonplace type. Frank looked at them steadily in turn. There was nothing to object to in either he owned, yet—he felt like Uncle Frank sitting in judgment, when he regarded them in relation to Jane. It was not a pleasant line of thought. ‘Who is this, though? Rather a good-looking girl,—well enough pleased with herself,—where have I seen the face? Ah! I remember, last night it was, as I passed this house coming back from the doctor’s. She was putting a letter in the box; she stared at me pretty hard as I passed. I should not have thought her quite Millie’s form, but I suppose a minister has to be friendly with all sorts.’

He turned round as he heard his host’s quick step, and presently the two were sitting with lighted pipes in cosy fashion by the fire. Talk flowed easily enough. Indeed Frank was of a sociable nature, a man that it was not hard to get on with.

He had taken up a book which lay on the top of the revolving bookcase at his hand. ‘*Antiquities of Galloway*. Are you well up in those, Millie?’

‘Not particularly,’ the minister had to own.

‘I ask, because if I settle in this neighbourhood, as I have an idea of doing, I mean to take up that sort of thing. A man’s always the better of a hobby, and in India I used to work away at such old remains as I came across. Even a smattering of knowledge gives a

zest to life. And I fancy there is room for study of the prehistoric remains in this part of the country?’

‘Have I not seen papers of yours in the *Contemporary*?’ asked Millie eagerly. ‘F. M. Hay, to be sure, I never thought of that till this moment.’

‘Yes! Once they published a thing of mine,’ said Hay. ‘But I have no knack of composition, that’s the truth. I can only set down the bald facts, I can’t make them interesting. Now if we were to collaborate, we might manage to turn out something worth. I’d supply the measurements, and you could draw the conclusions. This seems rather a maundering work,’ as he turned over the pages; ‘and the illustrations almost as prehistoric as the crannogs I hope to dig up. See there, how ridiculous!’

‘But there are curious facts in the old fellow,’ said Millie, taking the book on his knees; ‘Mr. MacDowall at Harbourhead lent it to me, but I can’t say I have read it as carefully as he says it deserves.’ (He had forgotten Miss Frederick, and was happy turning over the pages of the gossiping antiquary, and reading choice extracts to Frank, who sat on the other side of the hearth puffing at his pipe and listening.) Then he had to seek on his shelves for various other volumes that he wished to show to his visitor, and between them and the oat-cakes and beer that came in on the tray, the time slipped past very quickly.

'Eleven o'clock, I had no idea it was so late!' said Frank, as the little clock on the mantelpiece chimed out the hour. 'I had no intention of inflicting myself so long upon you when I came in. What's up now?' as Millie suddenly exclaimed with surprise, for his eye fell on the photograph on the shelf, 'How in the world?' and made a motion forward to thrust the smiling face of Miss Nelly M'Culloch out of sight.

'Oh! no matter, only I don't know how that got there; my servant must have admired it, I suppose.'

'It is a good photograph,' said Frank carelessly, rising to go. 'Well, I have enjoyed our chat, and you'll have to think seriously of going into partnership with me. Really, you know, we might make something of it, —if you could spare the time. We'll settle our plans by and by.'

'Good night,' said Millie heartily; 'there's nothing I should like better,' as he shut the manse gate after his departing visitor.

There is no doubt men are different from women. These two had spent a pleasant couple of hours together, and the thought of Jane, with whom both were sincerely in love, had hardly come into their heads. 'How did that impertinent picture get there?' It was staring in Millie's face when he re-entered the study, and he tried to remember where he last saw it. Oh, there was no mystery about it! When he flung it down

on the side table last night it must have been dislodged from its pink envelope, and no doubt Isabella, seeing it, had thought it a lovely ornament for the top of the clock. It was annoying that Hay had seen it. Millie had a natural prejudice against that self-satisfied face. He thrust it hastily into a drawer and thought no more of the owner.

‘A most agreeable fellow, Hay.’ He could not help liking the man. Apart from Jane indeed he was all that heart could wish. ‘And a distinguished sort of person in his way, though he pooh-poohs his own literary ability.’ Millie began to rummage among the odd magazines which filled one shelf in a corner, and soon found what he was looking for.

‘It was a good deal written about at the time, that paper. To be sure the style is rather bald. One sees that he’s not used to write much. What an interest,’ so his thoughts ran on, ‘might be given to Lochtown life if a friendly, intelligent man like Hay were to settle in the neighbourhood. To have him coming in and out asking one’s advice, getting one’s help in his researches.’

Millie had not previously had much chance to play the patron, and Frank could not have chosen a more endearing relationship for himself, than that of the pupil asking literary encouragement. Insensibly he had won an entrance into the younger man’s regard, which was to be the beginning of a lasting friendship.

'He is a good fellow, too, I think, one that would help in religious work.'

With the eye of a born minister, Millie seemed to see that the ideal chairman, for whom religious meetings in Lochtown had been languishing, was come at last. 'A most delightful man,' but then why should not Jane Frederick find him delightful also? What could the trouble be, in which she could not find it as easy to consult her cousin as to turn to a comparative stranger? Oh, what lovely eyes she had, how fair her face had shone out of the dark corner in church! Had but the morning come when he might speak to her again. And once more the feverish round of thought, and hope, and of disenchantment, and again of loyal love, began in the young man's mind. He took out his two notes and studied them for the twentieth time, he compared them with the brown paper in which Browning had come back. They were surely written by the same pen, the only difference was that a faint flower fragrance seemed to hang about the letters, of which the brown paper kept no trace. But that was natural enough.

It must be she. Who else could have written them? He would not, could not doubt her. Yet perhaps deepest in his troubled heart lay the hope that there was even some witchcraft at work, that the lady of his dreams had never stooped at all.

Then, like a wise man, he took up Thomas à Kempis

and read the pages that treat of Entire Resignation, and of Rest in God.

As Frank walked back to the George, he remembered, with some satisfaction, that he had no confirmation of the idea that Millie aspired to his dear Jane. It might be all moonshine, a jealous dream of his own. He liked the man and would be glad to see more of him.

‘Yet I don’t know how long my liking would last if I saw him casting sheep’s eyes on her. If she will only have me I have several plans in my head for that fellow’s advantage. Good times will be going all round if I get what I want.’ He smiled at the egotism of his own heart. ‘I wish my own way first, and then I’ll begin to help other people. What a noble character I am! I’d be sorry though, if I thought Millie had got himself entangled with that black-eyed young woman who stared at me last night. There seemed to be an unnecessary emphasis in the way he disclaimed her. A lovely night! and this time to-morrow I’ll know my fate!’

It was bright moonlight as he passed along by the old harbour, and a fishing boat was making ready to go out.

He stood and watched her for a while, forgetful of the lateness of the hour. At last all was in order, the sail ran up the mast, the ropes were cast off, and she glided gently out upon the silver sea. He watched her

round the pier and then go on her way, dark against the path of moonbeams and disappear into the black waste beyond.

‘ I wish you “Good luck,”’ he said softly, ‘ Good luck, and a safe return.’ For he had read the name on the bows, before she lifted her anchor, and it was the ‘ Jane of Lochtown.’

CHAPTER XXXII

TO PLAY THE MAN

A NEW day, a fair day, a day of sunshine and brightness.

Jane was perhaps a trifle paler than usual as she walked about her garden, doing little acts of kindness to her flowers, feeding her pigeons, paying special regard to the pair of fantails she had got from little Jack—pale, and with the pleasant languor that follows a headache, when the black tormentor has newly flown, and one knows not if his dark wings are entirely out of sight.

Frank was beside her before she was aware,—he came so softly across the grass. He surprised the happy smile into her eyes, so was sure the gladness must be all for him,—there was no one to share the welcome this morning.

How happy it was in that small sheltered place, and a whole world of happiness about them, around and above !

They did not seem to have much to say to each other, as they wandered about.

'I suppose you could not come for a walk,' said Frank presently, when all the small duties were done; 'if it would not tire you, dear, it is a lovely fresh day for a stroll.'

'I'll come,' said Jane meekly, and went to make herself ready.

They climbed the steep hill that watched over the town, and then they struck across the moor that stretched out brown and lonely to the further hills. It does not take long to get out of Lochtown, and face the solitary sweet places above. At last they left the path and sat down, Jane a little tired, on a heap of stones that rose among bushes of broom and withered bracken. Far away lay the blue open sea, and a wide stretch of country spread before their eyes.

'You were quite right,' said Frank suddenly, after Jane had pointed out to him the various landmarks that he ought to notice.

She thought he was not so attentive, or was it not so intelligent, as he usually showed himself, so gave up instructing him, and gazed instead at the beauty of the autumnal landscape.

'Was I?' she asked dreamily, watching the blue curl of peat-smoke, that rose from a half-hidden cottage roof.

'I went to Millie's meeting last night and I found him a wonderful fellow.'

'Did you?' said Jane with awakened interest. 'Oh, Frank, you are very good.'

'And he's a fascinating chap in his way,' he went on. 'I enjoyed a talk with him afterwards uncommonly.'

'Yes,' she said, waiting for more.

'Well, are you not pleased?' he asked. 'I thought you would be pleased.'

'I daresay I am,' she said. 'It was nice of you to go. I am glad you liked his address.'

'But don't you think he's fascinating?' he went on, coming closer as he spoke.

'Is he?' she said; 'perhaps he is.' She began to laugh a little nervously at the eagerness and insistence of Frank's tone. 'But why are you so anxious all at once that I should think so? Must we all be fascinating; is that the whole duty of man?'

She was plucking a piece of withered heather as she spoke, stripping off the poor pink bells in a thoughtless and reckless way, when her hand was stopped by his prisoning hand upon it.

'Jane,' he said in a troubled eager voice that she had not heard before,—'Jane, *I'm* not fascinating,' his hand gripped hers very close as he spoke. 'Oh, my dear, you know what I want—I want you always—always—I want you for my wife.'

He had come so close that, before she could answer, his other arm was round her, his dear face was near her own, and she said nothing at all. Are the eventful moments of life ever properly managed? I fancy not.

'My love,' he said with a very thankful sigh, 'my dear, dear love, I'm happy now.'

His brow had cleared, Jane looked at him and smiled.

'Why are you smiling at me?'

'Because you are a goose,' she said, 'a nice goose—but a goose—the greatest goose in Galloway—and the one I like best.'

Jane Frederick never could be long serious, and when she was happy her spirits rose very quickly.

'But you are not quite right, Frank,' she said presently.

'What about, love?'

'You *are* rather fascinating—to me—else why did I like you so soon? I did not know these things could be done so easily. We have not been acquainted very long, and we have not argued at all, and now——'

'We are going to be happy for ever,' he interrupted. 'It shows what rot people talk and write about things they don't understand. I believe in love at first sight. I loved you as soon as I saw you, and I couldn't have loved you before, so I have nothing to reproach myself with.'

'Perhaps I haven't much more,' said Jane; 'you see I like myself pretty well, and I think we are not unlike.'

'You are not old and grey,' he said fondly.

'Neither are you,' she replied; 'at least you'll do. And if you are sure we needn't argue, it will be an enormous relief to my mind. Seriously, Frank, don't you think we agree pretty well? It is such a comfort not to need to be at full stretch. That's what I like about you. When I was young I used to think it was so alarming in novels, you know. The couples never liked each other, at least if they did, they managed to conceal it from me; they looked at each other sardonically—they sneered and they snarled—till the beginning of the third volume, and then, when I was expecting it least, they turned out to be madly attached.'

'As we are,' said Frank very happily, 'as I am, at all events. I made up my mind the first day I came, and you can't say I ever tried to conceal it.' He looked so proud of himself, that Jane had to laugh at his airs of superiority. Then she fell to examining the sleeve of his coat which was very close at hand.

'Does it hurt very much?' touching it with a respectful finger. 'I could have cried, you know, if Emily had not been there to call me a baby.'

'But this is another coat,' said Frank briskly; 'and as for my arm it's nearly right. I hardly feel any pain.'

'Of course it's another coat,' said Jane. 'Don't I know every coat you possess?'

'Ah,' as a big drop fell on her hand, 'it's raining, Frank, what shall we do? The old mill, the very place for us, it's right down the hill, and we'll get there in a couple of minutes if we run.'

The heavens had been gradually overcast while they talked, and now a thunderstorm was upon them. It was well that Jane had remembered a shelter was near. The old mill stood on the bank of a burn that flowed from the moors. The manufacture of tweed cloth on a modest scale used to be carried on within it, but it had been partially burned and never rebuilt. It was a picturesque object still, leaning blackened amongst the green bushes by the water side, and its stone-tiled roof gave it quite the air of a feudal tower and served as a shelter from the storm. It was a favourite trysting-place for Lochtown lovers. So Jane's visit to it with her cousin was quite in keeping with her new condition. The empty doorway gave entrance to the dark interior. Some tools of a neighbouring crofter lay in a heap in one corner, a wheelbarrow, a little mound of hay, a couple of empty boxes. Sheets of rain were falling, but the lovers were safe inside. There was even something exhilarating to Jane in the sight of the rampart of water that shut them from the outer world, the sharp 'ping' of the raindrops as they rattled and danced on roof and

wall, and on the path by which they had come. She sat upon the heap of hay, Frank leaning against it beside her. A pair of happy friends. What more could she desire?

Millie was out in that tempest. He had not yet reached the old mill, the trysting-place to which he had been summoned, when the first gust of the storm overtook him. It seemed a mad thing to go on, to suppose that Jane would venture out on such a wild morning as this had grown, and yet—who could tell? It was not his place to fail her, and so he hurried on, the stinging rain in his face, the wind shrieking and hissing about his ears—and, what was that, was it not thunder beginning to growl among the farther hills? He ran down the path, splashing through the running water, that almost had grown into the proportions of a second stream, and, panting and breathless found himself in the shelter of the mill.

A sudden peal of thunder crashed overhead, a flash of vivid lightning filled the place, and by its revealing light he saw—

Ah! was it Jane, with laughing half-veiled eyes? Was it Hay that leaned towards her with an indescribable proud look of happiness, and placed, unrebuked, upon her dear hand, the sparkling diamond he drew from off his own?

A moment,—the light was gone, the scene was over—but that moment had told enough.

He leaned upon the blackened wall, he summoned up all his courage. Now, if ever, it was his hour to play the man.

The crash of the thunder had deadened the sound of his footsteps. But when the noise had died away his presence must be at once perceived.

She, womanlike, was the first to look round. 'Oh, Frank,' she said, with a little rustle and stir, slipping her hand from his, 'some one has come in.'

'Don't be afraid, Miss Frederick,' said Millie, coming forward, pale but steady. 'I came in here for shelter this moment; it is a most unexpected storm, isn't it? I hope you were not overtaken by it as I was.' His dripping clothes told their own tale of his unfortunate plight.

'My dear fellow,' said Frank concernedly, 'you must be soaking.'

'You here too?' said Millie in the heartiest voice he could summon up. 'How dark it is, to be sure.'

Not from him should they imagine that their secret was laid bare. He felt triumphant, upborne by the sense of holding the key of the situation,—he would protect them, shield them, put them at their ease.

Not yet was the sharp throb of sickening disappointment. He was in the exalted state that makes a martyr at the stake forget the fierce agony of the flame, in the sense of the noble cause for which he has dared to die.

No doubt of Jane's honour, no thought that he had been cruelly lured into a trap, crossed his mind. It is not to men like the Covenanter that such thoughts are likely to occur.

Hay, unruffled, debonair, with a new sound of gladness in his soft, kindly voice, was distressed about the condition of his poor young friend. 'My dear chap,' he said, circling round him like an anxious hen, 'I hope you won't be the worse of this—you are fearfully wet.'

'I am very strong,' said Millie; 'nothing ever hurts me. Miss Frederick is dry, I see, and that's the chief thing. There comes the sun; it will be blazing down upon us in five minutes, and I shall be dry before I am halfway across the hill.'

The bright beams were indeed beginning to shoot athwart the thunder-cloud, the birds' songs, hushed while the storm raged, rose again from the bushes, and the deserted mill was filled with cheerful light. Suddenly Millie felt as if his strength would fail him if he stood any longer looking on the sweet, kind face that was never to be kindest to him.

'I'll go now,' he said, with a half-sob in his throat. And before they were aware, he was gone into a shining mist of golden rain. They saw the thin, dark figure disappear up the brae as the drops grew rarer, and the sunshine more intense.

'He *is* a fascinating chap,' said Frank, with conviction.

And Jane, slipping her arm through his, said, 'We'll try to be kind to him, won't we?'

Is there any need to return to the little house in North Street to see the loving welcome Mrs. Frederick gave to Frank?

'You'll be good to her?' she said to him very solemnly. 'Oh, Frank, unless I were sure of that, I could not thank God as I do this day.'

'You may trust me, Aunt Mary,' he said, in tones as grave as her own. 'You were needing a son to look after you, weren't you? and I was so lonely.'

'And Jane is a sweet lassie,' said his aunt, 'a sweet lassie, and will make a good wife.'

'A very good wife,' said Frank, with a smile of pure content as his Jane came into the room.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE WHITE MAPPY

So his dream was over, his happy hopes were done.

He went tearing over the wet roads, away from Lochtown, away into loneliness ; he could haste along, but he could not, dared not, stop. How long he would have gone on I know not, but he was arrested by a very little cause—a wee laddie, crying as if his heart would break, cuddled up in his arms a white rabbit stiff and dead, and its little master not to be comforted for its loss.

‘Alick Blair,’ said Millie, who could not pass any creature in sorrow, ‘what ails you, man?’

‘My mappy,’ he sobbed, ‘my white mappy. I dinna ken wha’s killed it, but my mappy’s deid.’

Millie took the little rabbit in his arms. It had been struck by lightning, he thought. It must have died in a moment.

‘It was playing in granny’s garden yonder. I had ta’en it there for a ploy, and she gied me a wheen kail heids for it, and the rain begun, and I ran into the

hoose, and when it faired oot I cam', and there was "Whitey" lying, and I dinna ken wha's hurtit her, and I'm takin' her to mither; but I'm sair, sair feared she's deid.'

'Poor wee beastie,' said the minister, stroking its fur and taking the little boy's hand in his, 'it has been struck by the lightning, I think. But don't cry, don't cry; see, would a shilling buy a new one? and we'll dig a bonny grave for Whitey, and put up a stone for her. Will that not be grand? Poor mappy! its troubles are all over. Come, Alick, I'll help you to carry it home.'

So, hand in hand with the little boy, whose hopes had been blighted by the same lightning flash, Millie went, a silent companion in distress. There was something comforting in the child's warm, clinging fingers.

'Never tell me yon's no a good man,' said the mother in after days. 'I'll no forget in a hurry how he brocht Alick hame wi' his deid rabbit, and sat down there at the fireside, and whittled oot a braw wee tombstane from a bit auld brod that was lyin' in the coal-hoose, and cut the beastie's name intill't, "Whitey," killed sic a day in sic a year—a treat to see.

'And naething but a bit oatcake and a drink o' milk wad he tak, though I offered him a'thing I could lay my heid to. And a grave he dug, and pit the cratur in, and smoothit doon the divot aboon it, as if it had been a bairn. And "There, Alick," says he, "mappy's cosy

noo," and a shilling to him to buy a new ane, and him awa' in a moment, fleeing like a ghaist ower the fields again. Na, na, yon's the kind o' minister for me; guid baith to beast and body.'

'Maybe, maybe. But there's a when queer things tell't about him. A'body doesna think as muckle of him as you dae, Mrs. Blair.'

'A when queer things!—a when lies!' would be Mrs. Blair's scornful retort. 'Maybe a'body hasna as muckle sense as see the difference between ane that's a gentleman, and ane that's no.'

When Millie came home at last, well on in the afternoon, he was almost worn out. But it was not rest that awaited him, and in his excited, feverish state he was more glad to be called to active work, than to have time to sit down and brood.

'If you please, sir'—his handmaid came brimming over with sad importance to tell him the news—'Mr. M'Culloch's girl was here, and would you be so kind as to go down as soon as you came in, for Mrs. M'Culloch is very ill, and the doctor hardly expects her to live; and that was very soon after you went out, and she was back again an hour since. And Mr. M'Culloch's expecting the change any minute, and he hopes you'll go immediately.'

'Mrs. M'Culloch!' said Millie confused. He supposed he must have known of this illness and forgotten

it. Had weeks passed since he saw that dreadful daughter? His head seemed swimming. A nightmare of neglected duty overlay his other burdens. With an effort he collected his thoughts. No, no, this was only Monday. He had certainly seen M'Culloch yesterday in church; not a word had been said of serious illness then.

'Did you know of this, Isabella?' he asked, more sharply than it was his custom to speak. 'Why was I not told?'

'Deed and I thought you knew,' said the worthy woman, at once on the defensive. 'To be sure I thought you would miss Mr. M'Culloch from the meeting last night—him that's always so regular. But I might have spoken if that English gentleman had not driven ony wiselike thochts out of my head, getting the tray ready for company on the Sabbath, and all.'

'Well, well, Isabella, it's my own fault, I daresay,' said her master wearily. And before she could say more, he was down the street on his way to the household of sickness.

'There's something up,' said the wise Isabella to herself. 'It's time his mother was here to look after him. In this house I do not bide, if that lass M'Culloch is to be the mistress. Set her up with her photographs! He hasna let it stay long on the mantelpiece ony way; I can tell her that. And him off like a whittret, and

his clothes as damp as they can be after a' that rain. It's enough to give the poor laddie his death.'

Millie was reproaching himself bitterly, as he hurried along, for not having noticed the absence of his henchman on the previous evening. He had a true liking for Mrs. M'Culloch, which his unfortunate experience with her daughter did not affect. He vaguely remembered that young woman had said her mother was 'seedy,' but she had so soon passed to other matters that it was little wonder, perhaps, that it had slipped from his memory. No; that was no excuse for him. What is the use of a minister who does not minister to his people? and this worthy soul might have already passed away without any poor help and comfort he could give.

When he reached the house, and was ushered into the sick-room, he found matters had been somewhat exaggerated. Geordie had left his shop indeed, and was in attendance by the bedside, and Aunt Neilson's lugubrious face was to be seen in all its solemn length of woe, but Dr. Foster had found his patient better than he expected.

'Oh, Mr. Millie, we have been wanting you sorely,' said Geordie. 'We thought we were to have lost her two hours back, but the doctor gives us more hope now; he says she'll be spared to us all.'

'Oh yes, she'll do now,' said Dr. Foster cheerily,

shaking himself into his coat in the passage, and drawing on his driving-gloves after the manner of doctors. 'I'll look in again about six o'clock, and hope to find everything going on famously.'

'And you were out for a walk, and us in such sore distress?' said Geordie, curiosity overcoming even his sense of the importance of the occasion, and of his own dignity as being the head of a family, in which there had so nearly 'been a death.' 'I was wondering where you could have gone, not knowing of any particular trouble among the flock. I might have sent the lassie out the road to seek ye, at auld Luckie Wallace's maybe, but your servant said you had left no message, so I did not venture, for fear she should have missed you. But come ben to the parlour, sir; my daughter's there, poor lassie. She was so much overcome seeing her mamma so ill that the doctor said she had better no be in the room. Ye'll come ben, though, and offer up a bit prayer that the dispensation may be profitable to us a', and the sorrow sanctified, if it should prove no to be in the decrees of Providence that it should pass us by at the present season.'

Thus exhorted to his duty, Millie accompanied his elder into the parlour, where Miss M'Culloch was recovering from her distress. He felt as if everything was hollow, crumbling, and breaking around him. Had that poor godly woman, whose flushed, fevered face he

had seen upon the bed, spent all her life on Geordie M'Culloch's comfort and happiness, to be spoken of so calmly when in the balance between life and death? Was there not even loyal love between a long-wedded pious pair like these? And the girl who rose from an arm-chair at the fire as he came in, throwing down a novel hastily as she rose, where were the signs of the sorrow he had been told she felt? At least she had the grace to blush. She could not but remember how they had last parted.

'Mr. Millie is come to give us worship, my dear,' said Geordie humbly. 'Will you get the Books and call Jenny ben? Dear me, it is her mother that looks after a'thing; she's sorely missed, Mr. Millie, sorely missed.'

'Poor mother,' said the girl, 'she has not been off duty very long.'

She was a handsome creature as she stood there beside her round-shouldered obsequious father, who now busied himself with putting fresh coals on the fire, and then in drawing out an arm-chair for the minister.

'She works far too much, that's the fact. Before I would make myself a drudge as she does——' she spoke to both her hearers, not addressing herself directly to either, in the loud, unabashed key that was natural to her.

'Shall I ring, M'Culloch?' asked Millie, seating himself at the table, and drawing out his pocket Bible.

He was in no mood for hearing Miss Nelly's high-pitched conversation, while her poor mother still lay in such distress. Even while he was seeking out the passages of Scripture he meant to read, he felt the dark, keen eyes of the girl upon him. Was she ashamed, or had she put the whole scene of Saturday evening away from her mind? She seemed out of harmony altogether with the fact of sickness or the thought of death.

'Poor Geordie! perhaps I did him an injustice;' for when they rose from their knees there were traces of tears upon the worthy baker's face, and Millie observed how tired and worn he looked, as if the night's watching and anxiety had left their mark upon him.

'But the doctor thinks she's doing fine, now that the rash is out,' he repeated wistfully, to reassure himself and his minister, as they parted at the door. 'And I hope ye'll be none the worse yourself for coming into the house of sickness, as you've done this day. You've been very kind, sir, and I hope I'm sensible of all you named in your prayer.'

Was it a sob then that had come from the corner where Miss Nelly kneeled? It could not have been; for was it not rather a look of defiance than of humility that flashed at Millie as he left the room?

CHAPTER XXXIV

MIRY PLACES

BUT the worst for Millie was yet to come.

As long as he was rushing from place to place burying rabbits and praying for sick folk, he could keep his sorrow at bay ; but when the day was over, and he sat alone in his study, from which the gilding hope of a future presence was removed—ah ! then he had time to look around and sum up his loss. As the tree must feel on the morning after ‘a night of storm and moan,’ when it finds a gaping, aching fissure where was a strong branch clothed with wealth of sun-fed leaves ; as a general counting the dead that cumber even a victorious battle-field ; as a shepherd who reviews his flock when the snowdrift has done its worst ;—so Millie felt amid the broken fragments of his dearest dream.

The lightning flash had left him in no uncertainty ; its revelation had been at least merciful in its swift clearness. Jane could not wear that face for any one but her best beloved—not if she were indeed the Jane

on whom he had set his heart. Hay had the air of a man crowned with happiness, and his rival must confess it became him well. He was sitting over the fire, dismally admitting these things, when a note was brought to him with the message that a boy waited an answer. Ah! she might have spared him this. But who? what? Millie stared with astonishment at what he saw and read.

DEAR MILLIE—Will you excuse my troubling you about a matter we spoke of last night?—that paper of mine in the *Contemporary*. Did you say you had the number, August '90, in which it appeared? If so, and you can lay hands on it easily, please give it to the boy, and oblige,—Yours faithfully,

FRANCIS MAXWELL HAY.

P.S.—No bad effects from the wetting, I hope.

Rev. H. MILLIE.

'There is some utter devilry here,' thought Millie, as he stood with the note in his hand. The neat, well-formed writing that he had unhesitatingly ascribed to Miss Frederick had, it seemed, been none of hers. He must look into this. Meanwhile the lifelong student's habit of accuracy and punctuality in small matters urged him to look for the paper and send it to its author.

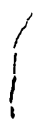
'No doubt he is going to read it to her. One might have found something more interesting the first night—the very first night of happiness,' whispered his envious heart.

But we cannot all be poets; and it was perhaps natural enough that Frank, having had his thoughts recalled to his single literary production, might be anxious to look it over, or, as was actually the case, to amuse his aunt with it, whilst he and Jane held an endless, low-voiced talk over their future happy lot.

Millie sat with the undoubted specimen of Hay's handwriting before him. He unlocked the drawer in which the brown paper cover and the two enigmatic notes were lying. The first he compared carefully with the letter he had just received. To his sore heart there seemed nothing amusing in the fact that he had kissed that paper and paid worship to the work of Hay's fingers! The oracular notes had never been so dear to him; he seemed never to have been sure that they were the divinity's genuine utterances.

As he compared them with the others, he wondered at his own folly in having been so far deceived. 'They are clumsily imitated after all,' he owned; 'only a love-sick idiot could have been hoodwinked.' He opened another drawer. What was that faint, sickly perfume that met his nostrils as he bent over it?

'Good heavens!' Again Millie was betrayed into an expletive, and by the same face as had provoked his hasty anger before—'Nelly M'Culloch'; the scent that hung about the photograph was the same that pervaded



those wretched scraps. He drew a deep breath of indignation, disgust, and relief.

‘It was she! the bold, handsome, impertinent, unendurable hussy!

‘Thank God that no one knows, that no one need ever know, how I wronged my lady, my love!’

Then the remembrance that she was lost to him for ever came like a wave over the young man’s tender heart, and I hope no one will think the worse of him that he laid his head upon the table, and cried over his shattered dream.

He was roused from his sad thoughts by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance, before he had more than time to compose his face and steady his voice, of his servant, who said, with a mysterious and furtive air, ‘Please sir, there is one that wishes to see you.’

‘Take him into the dining-room then, and I’ll be with him directly,’ said the young man, not altogether sorry to be interrupted.

‘The fire in the dining-room’s black out, and I’ll do naething of the kind,’ said the tyrant to herself, as her master disappeared into his bedroom to get rid of the traces of his late agitation. ‘In here she comes or nowhere; and I cannot say I think it seemly for a young woman, and her with a mother at death’s door, coming to visit a young lad like him.’

So when Millie returned to lock away the papers, which he remembered, to his annoyance, he had left on the table, he found some one whom he little expected to see, standing on his hearth.

‘You here?’ he said awkwardly, while a dark flush of anger and annoyance overspread his face. ‘Your mother is not worse, I hope; Dr. Foster thought well of her this afternoon.’

‘Oh! she’s all right,’ said Miss M’Culloch, with the light laugh which irritated all Millie’s nerves; ‘no, it’s not that; but—why you see, Mr. Millie, a joke’s a joke, but perhaps it may be carried on long enough—and—oh, I know quite well you won’t give me credit for any good motive, but——’

‘Why should you think anything of the sort?’ said Millie, on whom every one of the girl’s moods seemed to jar. ‘Won’t you sit down?’ and he constrained himself to offer her his own chair, while he stood guard over the other—which was never to be Jane’s.

‘I must own I don’t remember any joke. I am glad to hear Mrs. M’Culloch goes on well. Perhaps you have a message from your father?’

‘I have no message,’ said the visitor, refusing the offered seat, and looking with her bold eyes straight into Millie’s. ‘I must say you don’t make it very easy for me to tell you—to confess to you, I suppose is the right word——’

'I am sorry,' said Millie, who was easily impressed. 'Do sit down and I shall try to understand.'

There was something honest in the young woman's face that appealed to the troubled heart of her minister, and disarmed his anger.

'Ah!' she exclaimed suddenly, as she took the seat he again moved towards her, and her eye fell on the writing-table and the papers that strewed it. She put out her hand, and snatched up the mysterious notes, and before Millie grasped her intention they were flaming in the grate.

'You wrote them,' he cried, stammering in the effort to be calm.

'Yes, I wrote them,' she said; 'now you understand. I wrote them for a joke, you know, and now I have burned them. I suppose I have a right' (defiantly) 'to do what I like with my own.'

'A perfect right,' said Millie very quietly; 'but you should not have written them.'

'I know that,' she said, 'and I came here to say so; but you don't help me much. Look here, though; I felt what a shame it was when you were praying to-day, and mother so ill and all; you seemed not to bear malice about—about—Saturday night, you know; and I thought I'd come and say I was sorry. And it was all a lark after all. It did Jane Frederick no harm; *she* did not know anything about it.'

Millie did not trust himself to speak. For all answer he came to the table, took up Frank Hay's note, and handed it to her without a word.

She read it through with a puzzled expression, then threw it down and burst into her usual laugh. 'Goodness me! and it was that fellow's writing after all? Well, I never. What a row and a rumpus about nothing! But don't you want to know how I did it? Mrs. Frederick's servant Jenny is cousin to our Maggie, and she brought a parcel for you into the kitchen, when I was there looking after something for mother. I asked what it was, and I heard it was a book from Miss Frederick. The girls went into the bedroom to have their talks, and—I suppose you fine folks would call it dishonourable—anyhow I opened the parcel to see if there was anything worth reading, and then the devil of mischief entered into me, and I copied Jane Frederick's writing. It's always handy to know how people write, you know, and at school I was counted clever at copying. And then the thought struck me to see if a line from her would bring you; and it was that swell Hay after all!

'Well, you've got the whole story now, and what do you say to it?'

Millie lifted his head from his hands and said nothing.

'Well,' she said, 'you've a right to be angry, I dare-

say; still, I've told you I'm sorry, and I can't do more.'

'I'm sorry too,' he said slowly. 'Oh, can't you see the ugliness of what you did? Can't you see how ghastly that kind of fun is? No! I'm not angry; I'm more sick. A girl who knows better.'

'Here, we'll throw these into the fire too'—tearing Frank's letter and the unlucky brown paper across and across, and holding them down with the poker till they were burned. 'Now go away and let us forget it. I hope never to think of such an idiocy again.'

Miss M'Culloch did not rise. She sat instead staring down at the rug, with a troubled look new to her handsome face.

'You don't forgive me then?' she said, lifting her dark eyes full of tears to his. 'I suppose you will never think well of me again. You ministers are just like other people when it comes to anything hard. I was a fool to imagine anything else; but I'll know better in future.'

She got up and pushed back her chair with a harsh jar; then began tying on her veil with hands that shook.

'I don't know what you wish,' said Millie troubled, sorry for the girl and for himself. 'I don't bear malice. I daresay you were half in fun and meant no harm.'

'I don't suppose you do know what I wish,' said she with a half laugh, half sob; 'you are too good to know

any weakness like me. Will you really shake hands with such a sinner?' And before Millie could withdraw it she was pressing hot, angry kisses on his reluctant hand.

'Oh, I've shocked you again,' she cried, 'but it's your own fault. Why do you look so coldly at me—at me, poor Nelly, that wants nothing but your love? Have you not the heart of a man in you that you can treat an honest girl so hardly?' And she looked up at him with her eyes of passionate tenderness.

Millie was moved. What was he that he should be hard on the poor agitated creature? He laid his hand upon her shoulder, pitying her distress.

But the light of triumph that leaped into her eyes stung him as if it had been a serpent. 'You will then—you'll love me after all?' she cried, and he shrank from her in fear.

'Go away,' he said, ashamed of his momentary weakness. 'Oh, go away, and pray for a better mind. God forgive you, and have mercy on us both.'

His tone of horror and distress frightened her into compliance. She went away without another word, leaving him almost distraught with shame and self-abasement, and, above all, with sorrow for the girl's disgrace. He had been down among the miry places, while Jane in her serene air of maidenliness was far as an angel above his reach.

CHAPTER XXXV

'MY GOOD DAYS ARE DONE'

It was a week after all these events that the news came to Frank Hay and his happy betrothed wife that the young minister was dying. 'Poor chap! I fear we shan't pull him through,' said the kind doctor, who had come in to prescribe for Mrs. Frederick's first autumnal cold. 'Yes, he has been ill for some days—a feverish attack with brain complications. I fancy he had been imprudent—gone about in wet clothes too long. He was never a fellow that spared himself—a fine young chap. He'll be much missed in Lochtown.'

Jane sat very still. So all through this happy week when she and Frank had been so utterly content, walking, talking, going to her favourite haunts, looking at places where it was possible their married life might begin, Millie had been drawing by painful, rapid strides, near and nearer to the gates of death.

'I wish I had known of this,' said Frank, his kind voice full of trouble. 'We have been so much engaged,

we don't seem to have had any thoughts for our friends. But it is terrible to think of Millie being so ill. I don't know when I saw a fellow I took such a fancy for.'

'Yes, it's very sad,' said the doctor, rising to go. 'His mother has come to nurse him, but I hardly think he'll last through the night. He's wearing himself out ; something seems preying on his mind—some love affair I should say. There's no harm in telling you as much, for you'll not let it go farther. But indeed I fear the poor fellow won't mind how many of us know his secrets soon.'

'Infectious? Oh no, not at all. I fancied at first it was to be scarlet fever, but it's not that. All my patients are getting over that. Mrs. M'Culloch, the baker's wife, had it pretty smartly, but she's making a capital recovery. By the way' (turning at the door), 'did you ever hear it hinted that there was anything between *her* daughter and poor Millie? I am told she's making (the girl, I mean) a great show of distress over his illness ; but I can't think it at all likely he was attached to her.' And the doctor ran down to his gig, leaving three sad hearts behind him.

How long ago they seemed, those days before Frank came, before Jane's heart had learned to love him, when she had thought with a fanciful interest of Henry Millie. She was looking back now across a tract of golden happiness, and she thought with a pang of the

bright spirit that was walking lonely still among those far-off hopes and fears. She lifted up her eyes to Frank, who was looking grave and sad as he leaned his arm against the mantelpiece. How happy they were! how content! Every day she loved him more dearly, more completely. Their lot was the perfect lot and her beloved was her best beloved. And this was the lot for Millie—to die so soon, in distress and feeling himself forsaken.

This life is but the passage of a day,
This life is but a pang and all is over,—
But in the life to come, which fades not away,
Every love shall abide and every lover.

‘Poor fellow!’ said Frank softly, reading her face. ‘I’ll go along and ask for him at once. I wish some one had let us know.’

‘It is strange that Anne Kennedy did not tell us,’ said Mrs. Frederick. ‘She is fond of a piece of sad news.’

Frank was inquiring at the door of the manse, and receiving the sad answer, ‘No better, no hope,’ when an elderly woman came out into the hall, and hearing his voice advanced to the door.

‘My son is very, very ill,’ she said in the tone of dull hopelessness that anxious watchers learn so quickly. She took the card from the servant’s hand, and looked at it, and then at Frank curiously.

'Mr. Hay? would you mind coming in here for a moment?' She led the way into poor Millie's deserted study. 'Poor fellow! poor Henry!' she said in an unemotional way, 'I fear he'll never be here again. I have lost two sons already since Mr. Millie died; Henry will be the greatest loss—it is hard to have sorrow upon sorrow like this, but we must learn to submit. You are Mr. Hay, Mrs. Frederick's nephew, I believe. Henry wrote me that you had been very kind.'

She was mechanically dusting the ornaments on the mantelshelf as she spoke, the poor fellow's favourite pipe, his odds and ends—familiar trifles that looked so pitiful now in the presence of the end.

'I took a great liking to your son,' said Frank in the soft voice that prepared people to think well of him.

'Yes,' said the widow, laying down the handkerchief with which she was tidying up. 'Mr. Hay,' she went on, 'would you mind coming in to look at him? It seems to me there's something on his mind, and perhaps he might do well yet if he could only be set at rest. He talks on and on about some lady whom he never puts a name to—and "Hay, Hay," is ever on his tongue; and when I saw your card, I thought perhaps it was providential—if you would be so kind.'

'I'll be only too glad,' said Frank.

'But who the lady is I know not,' said the poor mother, applying the dusty handkerchief to her eyes

unaware of the grotesque effects of streaks and soilure she thereby produced. 'People gossip so terribly about young men—and ministers you know are always the most talked about—but a gentleman like you is a different matter; you'll not repeat any nonsense the poor laddie may say.'

Frank followed her into the bedroom, where a nurse in the shape of Anne Kennedy sat by the pillow. It was sad to see poor Millie's fevered, wasted face, and to hear the ceaseless muttered words which flowed from his lips.

'Far above me, far, far—yet I thought she might—the desire of the moth for the star—fair as a star, you know, "a star when only one is shining in the sky." Miss Rossetti? Ah! but she doesn't know anything about it—she couldn't possibly know—no one told her about it. Four o'clock—"one star a chrysolite"—and the grey sea and the green woods and she—sitting there, my queen! No! no! you don't know her name, but Hay does—a nice chap Hay. Go away, go away. Ah! rub it off, rub it off! How did she dare? I am a servant of God. Not beside *her*. Hay wrote it; he writes very well—beautifully. "Thank you, I am very glad I came"—but, after all, "Salvation is the only necessary thing," and she must never, *never* look at me like that. Hay will tell her to go away. I tell you, he is a gentleman; he will believe me; he will not allow her to read it.

"One born to love you, sweet." Send for Hay and he will put it all right ; he will send it up to London. But no ! no ! no ! how could I give her the hand that has been defiled ? Like Cranmer, you know, Cranmer. Dip it in the Loch, that will cool it, and "you and I who parted" how— does it go?—"who parted will meet" Old Mill, 12 o'clock. And it was Hay all the time—Hay was there.'

'Hay is here,' said Frank softly, laying his cool hand on Millie's brow. 'Hay is here, and no one shall hurt you. Lie still and try to sleep, and no one shall come near you.' He took the fevered hand that was waving so aimlessly over the cover and held it in his own strong grasp. 'Perhaps you would go and rest a little, Mrs. Millie,' he whispered, 'and take Miss Kennedy with you—you must both be worn-out—and I can look after him. I am well used to fever.' He began changing the ice as he spoke, which was kept constantly at the patient's head, and for a little the weary babble had stopped. When the room was empty it began again. Millie turned his dark eyes upon Hay with the painful look of non-recognition we all remember to have seen. 'Hay,' he said ; 'some one said Hay was here, but I don't see him—I see no one,' and his voice dropped into a whisper ; 'no one but a temptress, a sort of serpent ; she has red cheeks and she smiles, but she is a serpent ; and I shall never be worthy now, never be near her, no ! not in Heaven. They don't know who I mean ; she is wearing

his ring; bright light, flashing light, and it killed the poor thing; that was very sad. Don't cry, Alick; it's dead, it's dead; but I can assure you, Hay, I was cruelly deceived. On my honour as a gentleman. Mother must not know, but Hay will tell *her*; it is all a lie, a cruel lie.'

'Yes, old chap, I'll tell her; she trusts you entirely; she knows you would do nothing that was not straight.' Frank's steady, low tones, seemed to reach Millie's troubled brain, and he lay still for a few moments. 'A lie, oh, a lie, and she will never know I loved her. But didn't Hay say he would tell her? Hay loves her. "Alas! for me, then my good days are done."'

'She understands all about it,' went on the soothing voice beside him; 'Jane knows it's all right; she thinks no end of you. Hay will let her know what you say.'

'Are you sure?' asked Millie. There seemed intelligence in the tone, which had taken a sound like that of a sleepy child.

'Quite sure,' said Frank. 'And now you must go to sleep. I am going to read you to sleep, and when you awake you'll be all right.'

He took up the Bible which lay at the bedside. It opened at the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, and he read it to the end.

'They always said I had a power of mesmerising people, and I begin to believe there's something in it,'

he thought, as he glanced at his patient. The struggles and tosses of the sufferer had grown less frequent, the painful muttering had entirely ceased. Frank saw with thankfulness that the lids had fallen over the dark anguished eyes. 'If the poor chap's strength only holds out, he should do now,' he thought, as the long breaths showed that Millie had fallen asleep.

The door opened softly, and Dr. Foster's face appeared. Hay held up his finger, and he drew near noiselessly to the bedside.

'Well, you've worked a miracle,' said the doctor in a wondering whisper. 'The first natural sleep he's had for a week—every minute of that is worth gold; if it lasts even for an hour he'll live, and he'll owe his life to you, sir, I can tell you.'

'He's very welcome,' said Frank. 'I hope the poor fellow will thank me,' he mentally added as he went to tell the good news to the mother. 'It will be hard on him when he comes to know all.'

'Yon Mr. Hay came and sent him to sleep!' was Mrs. Kennedy's comment on the good news which her daughter Anne conveyed to her that night. 'Humph! that was very clever of him, I suppose. Oh, well, he's a wiselike man, and Mrs. Frederick's nephew, and maybe as good as you say, but I'm mistaken if there's not more sense in Millie's little finger than in all that fine

gentleman, well-cut coat, and twisted moustache, and all the rest of it. And if I had been a lassie like Jane, and looking out for a lad, I ken well who I'd have chosen.'

'Oh, mamma,' said Miss Kennedy, breaking into half hysterical laughter (the poor lady was indeed worn out with want of sleep and anxiety), 'you do say such dreadful things! Dear Mr. Millie never thinks of such earthly matters; he could never, never care for a person like Jane; he is far too spiritually minded.'

'Ye'd wonder,' said the old lady drily; 'after all, the lad's a lad as well as a minister, and I never heard that in Scotland we insisted on the celibacy of the clergy.'

'Of course not, of course not,' said Miss Anne meekly, drying her tears and checking her laughter; 'only there is something so unsuitable about dear Jane, —and when dear Mr. Millie is just given back to us from the very gates of Heaven, as it were, one can't help feeling as if there were a sort of profanation in associating him with worldly matters at all.'

'Worldly or not, I miss him sorely. It will be a good day to me when he's able to be out again. There's one old woman in Lochtown that thinks a heap of him whatever the young ones may do—and so I'll tell him as soon as I get a chance.'

CHAPTER XXXVI

‘TO WISH YOU JOY’

‘ARE you in a forgiving humour, Aunt Mary?’ said Frank, one morning later than the events last narrated, as he came in with a letter in his hand. ‘Here’s something for you to exercise Christian charity upon.’

THE PINES, RICHMOND.

MY DEAR NEPHEW—Thanks for your last, which ought to have been acknowledged sooner, but Lady Millicent and I have been exceedingly busy. If Mary is pleased I know no reason why I should object to your engaging yourself to Jane Frederick. She seems a strong, healthy girl, so I hope there won’t be any bad results from your marriage, though as a rule they say first cousins are better apart. But that’s your own affair.

I wish you joy of Craig Hay. If you take my advice you’ll live there a year or two before making an offer for it. It’s not the most lively place to settle in for life, and her ladyship bids me say she is sure there is dry-rot in the butler’s pantry.

When do you think of being married? I fear it will be quite impossible for me to give Jane away, as Mary hinted I should in her last letter. Unless she likes to bring her up to town and have the wedding there. Then I might manage.

By the way, Lady Millicent suggests that if you are really going to Craig Hay, you might find room there for the family pictures, which were sent up to us when the place was sold. We've not been able to find a good light for them ; to tell the truth, your aunt thinks them so ugly she has never had them unpacked—except the Gainsborough of course—which every one says is very fine.

So, if you would care for them, you are heartily welcome to have them back. Send me a wire when your plans are matured, and I'll see that the pictures are sent off. Love to Mary and the young lady.—Your affectionate

FRANCIS HAY.

P.S.—What have you done about that other affair ? A pretty little thing I hear she is. Has Mary no objection to make ?

The postscript was added on a separate half sheet with which Frank did not think fit to annoy his aunt.

'We'll not show this letter to Jane, I think,' he said, when Mrs. Frederick returned it to him ; 'we'll tell her about the pictures—and the dry-rot,' he added with a smile.

'Yes,' said his aunt. 'Frank means kindly about the pictures, I think, though he may not express it very pleasantly.'

'And it will be much better,' said her nephew, 'that MacLure should give Jane away. He represents her father. It would be absurd for a Hay to hand her over to a Hay.'

'You put things pleasantly,' said Mrs. Frederick

gratefully. 'Lady Millicent's influence is so strong over your uncle. She could always make him do whatever she chose. But he knows very well I will be glad to see the pictures hanging in their own places again. "Ugly!" and my mother was the loveliest woman of her day, and my grandmother, Lady Jane Maxwell, not the least ill-looking, though perhaps no great beauty. Really I have no patience with Frank when he repeats such nonsense. And he has hung up the picture of a mere cousin, Sir Andrew Blair, because it is a Gainsborough, and let his own father and mother lie shut up in a garret! And I always heard Sir Andrew was little better than a natural, poor fellow. He was never married, and when he died his picture came to Craig Hay, and it used to hang in the little parlour. That was before people thought so much of Gainsboroughs as they seem to do now.'

'Ugly or not we'll be glad to have any he likes to send,' said Frank. 'And we'll have some good days in Craig Hay, in spite of Lady Millicent's croaking. Ah! there is Millie, poor fellow. He's coming in, I declare. I did not know the doctor allowed him to come so far.'

Frank had been away for a few days in Edinburgh, seeing lawyers about Craig Hay. He had taken it on a lease, and thither he and Jane, with Mrs. Frederick, were to remove after Christmas. The wedding was to be in the beginning of December, the short honeymoon

to be spent in London, and then the New Year was to see the beginning of life in the old home.

Frank had arrangements to make, additional furniture to order, painting to set on foot, all of which had kept him out of Lochtown, so it had come about that this was his first sight of Millie, since he had been permitted to try his walking powers. He went hastily to open the door and bring him in. How thin and wasted he looked! and how feeble on his feet!

Jane caught sight of the pair as she came in from the almost flowerless garden, where only the chrysanthemums lingered, and it was cold work to scatter the pigeons' grain.

She had not seen Millie since their meeting in the Old Mill. How terribly changed he was! He leaned on Frank's kind arm in the doorway of the dining-room, and turned to greet her, as she came in with the cold breath of the winter morning.

'Jane,' said Frank, 'here he is. Tell him you think he looks well, and then we'll go in to the fireside.'

Millie looked at her with his clear, deep eyes; he held her hand gently, then looking at the ring which sparkled on the other, he said: 'You will allow me to wish you joy now with all my heart.'

He seemed older, more manly, less impetuous than before his illness. Jane had never admired him so much.

'Thank you,' she said meekly, blushing like any schoolgirl; and passed before him into the room.

Millie was still in the blessed languor of convalescence. He lay back in the arm-chair in which kind hands had placed him — all his perceptions seemed to himself lulled and only half awake.

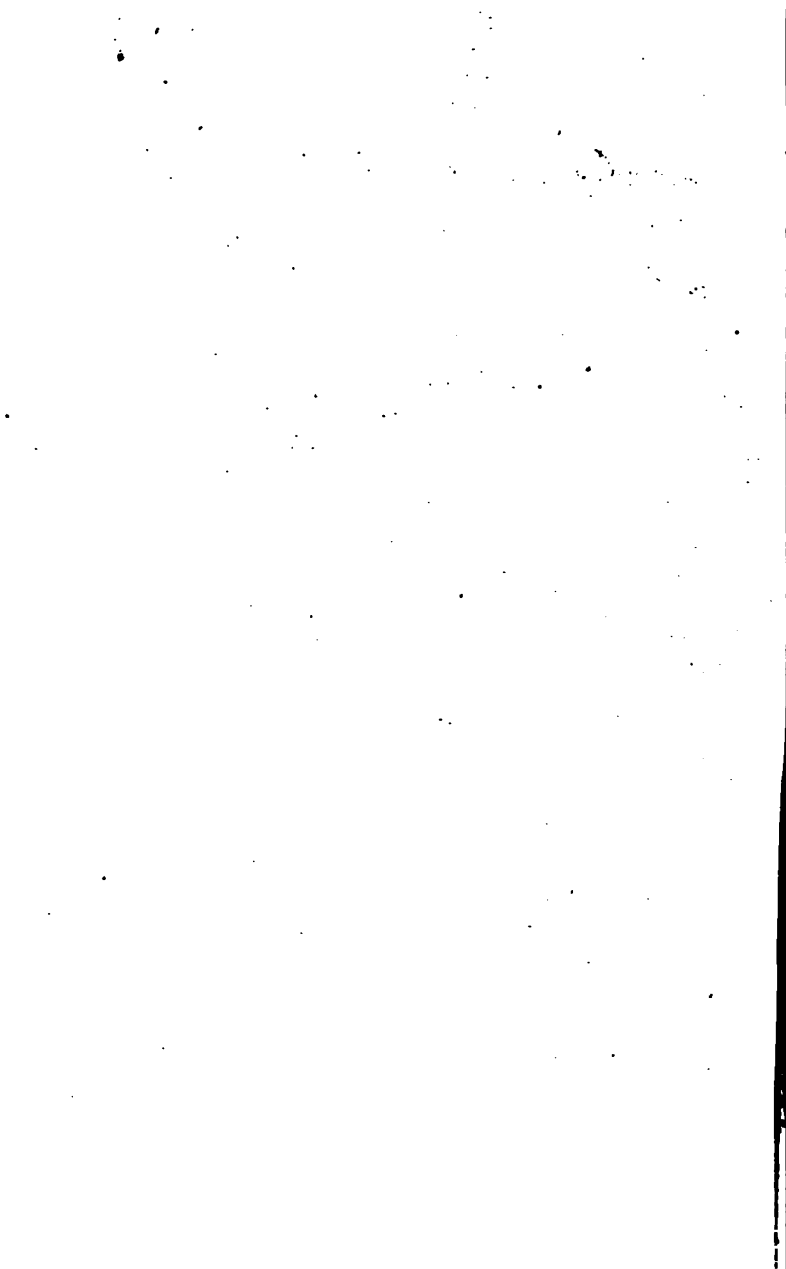
He clung to Hay with a strange sense of dependence. Was it possible that he had ever eagerly longed for anything? Jane was as sweet as ever, but her sweetness had a removed touch. She was Beatrice to his Dante. Long might this temper last.

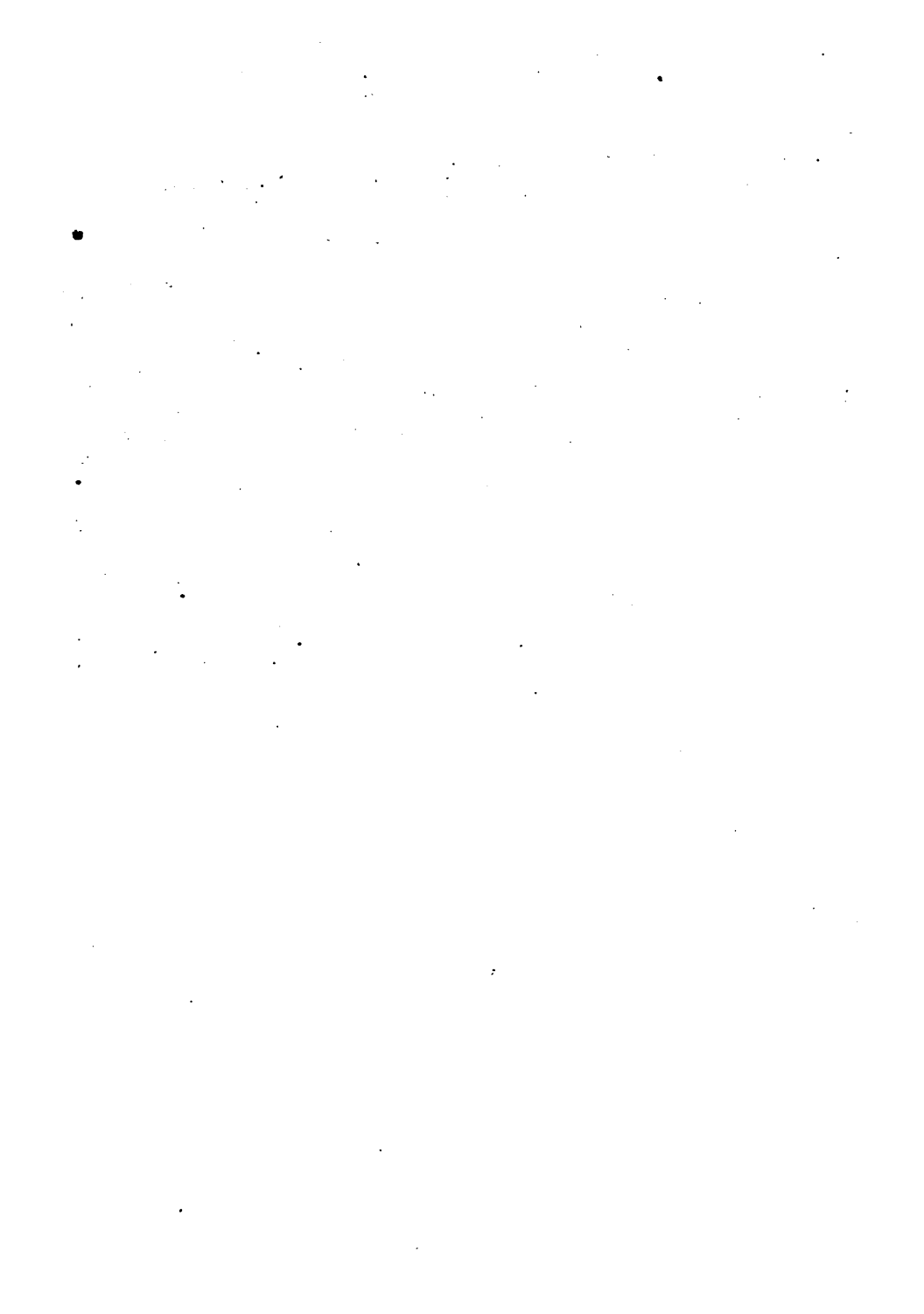
'I'll take this fellow home,' said Frank presently, when he thought his protégé might be growing weary. 'Mrs. Millie will never forgive us if we overtire you.'

So they went down the street together, and as Jane watched them pass out of sight, she felt half sadly, yet surely with a larger measure of thankfulness, that her wish was granted, and that she had seen the beginning and the end of a young man's 'dearest dream.'

THE END

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